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July/August 2020

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EXTENDING A LIFELINE

Musicians' creative response to the Covid-19 lockdown has been heart-warming. My inbox is daily bombarded by emails emanating from around the globe inviting me to listen to, or join in, online singing, from vocal workouts to choral workshops, from singing songs from musicals and the folk tradition to joining orchestras for the classical repertoire, from online church services complete with hymns to listening to music that is balm for the soul. For inspiration, turn to this issue's Encounters interviewee, Ben England, who launched the Quarantine Choir (p.82), or to David Hill's Choral Clinic (p.56), or to the News story (p.7) about Phillip Faber, who has got a third of the population of Denmark joining in.

Musicians are known for their resilience. Indeed, they have been forced to develop it over the centuries as music in general has been regarded as a pleasant 'optional extra' by most wielders of power – notable exceptions being the Habsburgs, whose renaissance rulers we have to thank for a cache of compositions, now seeing the light of day again after half a millennium's hibernation (see feature, p.23).

The downside to this indomitable spirit is that, in the UK at least, musicians are usually overlooked by governments, who appreciate the shop window of the creative arts (not to mention the £111bn they contribute annually to the country's economy, of which £5.2bn comes from the music industry) but that's where their interest ends. We all know the difficulties that the cancellation of concerts and events due to Covid-19 has imposed on professional musicians, many of whom depend on freelance



engagements which melted like snow with the closure of public venues. Some organisations are doing what they can to mitigate the financial losses visited on musicians: see our News pages for details of grants. Meanwhile, at the end of May an Incorporated Society of Musicians survey revealed that music sector professionals face financial ruin if the UK government's limited Self-Employment Income Support Scheme – which compensates

those whose freelance earnings are more than 50 percent of their income – is not extended. And the Office for National Statistics has reported that three-quarters of businesses in the arts, entertainment and recreation industry have 'temporarily closed or temporarily paused trading', while of those that have continued, two-thirds report a drop in turnover of over 50 percent. So well done to the 50 members of the House of Lords who wrote an open letter to the government calling on them to compensate those in the performing and creative industries. You can contribute towards this pressure by signing a petition at bit.ly/3bXFvNo – just one click is all it takes.

Because of ongoing disruption caused by Covid-19, Choir & Organ will be published bimonthly for July/August and September/October. Subscription terms will be extended to guarantee that subscribers receive the full number of issues paid for. Should you have any queries regarding your subscription, please contact our customer services team on +44 (0)1722 716997 or subscriptions@markallengroup.com.

Maggie Hamilton

Choir & Organ shines a global spotlight on two distinctive fields of creativity, celebrating inventiveness and excellence in all their forms.

We aim to inspire our readers through giving a platform to conductors, organists, composers, and choirs of every kind; and by showcasing the imaginative craft of pipe organ building across the centuries, critiquing new organs and tackling ethics in restoring historic instruments.

Specialist writers appraise new editions and recordings of standard repertoire and works fresh from the composer's pen, while our news and previews chart the latest developments in a changing world and present opportunities to become involved.

Choir & Organ is an invitation to engage with two unique areas of music – to explore the new, and look afresh at the familiar.

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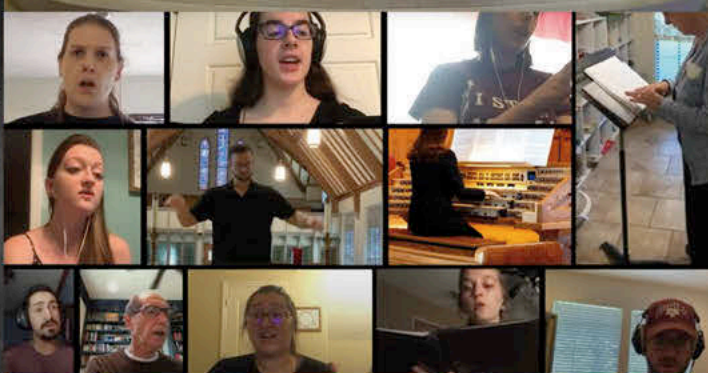
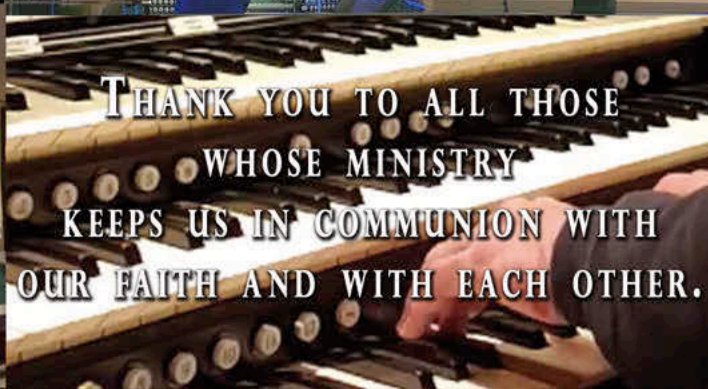


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'Profound and quirky; transparent and richly communicative' – take a guided tour through the choral canon of the Master of the Queen's Music. COVER PHOTOGRAPH © BEN EALOVEGA

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CALLING ALL COMPOSERS



▲ The RCO Composition Competition jury comprises (l to r) Gerard Brooks (chair), Judith Weir and Thomas Trotter

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ORGANISTS HAS ANNOUNCED the RCO Composition Competition 2020.

Submissions are invited of works for solo organ, or for organ with an instrument or voice (one work per applicant).

The competition is in two categories:

1. Applicants under 25 years of age at the submission deadline (a work of 3-6 mins);
2. Applicants of 25 years of age and over (there is no upper age limit) at the deadline (a work of 5-8 mins).

The writing for organ should be playable comfortably on an instrument of at least two manuals and pedal (the use of pedal and more than one manual is expected), and where the composer is not an organist a general guide to required dynamics and

timbres may be provided on the score rather than detailed registrations.

The adjudication panel will comprise Judith Weir CBE, Master of the Queen's Music and a recent recipient of the RCO Medal; Thomas Trotter, international concert organist and Birmingham City Organist; and Gerard Brooks, the RCO's current president, who will act as the panel's chairman.

First prizewinners will have their works played at College events, recorded for permanent upload to iRCO, the RCO's ground-breaking digital hub, and published by the institution. Runners-up will have their works featured in performances at RCO-organised events.

Full details, terms and conditions and entry process can be found at bit.ly/2Ty0G2m.

The RCO has long been associated

with new compositions. The first organ composition associated with the College – Henry Hiles's *Fantasia*, later published by Novello – was the result of a competition, run in its foundation year of 1864. A notable, recent work is Simon Holt's *The Legend of Melusine*, a work for treble and organ commissioned jointly by the RCO (celebrating 150 years) and Southbank Centre, marking the restoration of the Royal Festival Hall organ; it was premiered at the RFH in December 2014. *Unbeaten Tracks*, a volume of eight new works commissioned by the RCO in 2001, is published by Faber Music and includes works by David Bedford, Judith Bingham, Graham Fitkin, David Matthews, Roxanna Panufnik, Errollyn Wallen, and Huw Watkins.

Deadline: 17:00 BST on Tuesday 1 September 2020.

APPOINTMENTS & AWARDS

The Incorporated Society of Musicians has appointed **Professor Chris Collins** as ISM president 2020-21 from 1 June.

The choral category of the 2020 **BBC Music magazine awards** was won by Gabriel Jackson's *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ*, with the Choir of Merton College, Oxford and Oxford Sinfonia under the direction of

Benjamin Nicholas [Delphian DCD 34222].

Timothy Burke has been appointed chorus director of the chorus of the Royal Northern Sinfonia, succeeding Hugh Brunt.

Daniel Hyde, director of music at King's College, Cambridge, has been appointed patron of the Eric Thompson Trust.

Naomi Belshaw has been appointed project manager of the London Oriana Choir's five15 programme, a project to support and champion women composers.

Stainer & Bell have appointed **Angus Smith**, founder and artistic programmer of the Orlando Consort, to the new role of choral ambassador

YOU'LL NEVER SING ALONE

A THIRD OF DENMARK'S POPULATION tuned in to live sing-alongs hosted by the state Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) during the country's Covid-19 lockdown.

On 16 March, Denmark's first day of self-isolation, the conductor Phillip Faber made a short Facebook broadcast from his piano at home, inviting viewers to sing along to favourite songs from Denmark's *High School Song Book*, *Hymn Book* and from classic films.

The following day, after overwhelming engagement, Faber's sing-along was moved to the state broadcaster DR's primary television channel, DR1, under the title *Morgensang* ('Morning Song'). Two weeks later, its audience had soared to over 340,000, and remains at a quarter of a million, while its Friday night offshoot, *Fællessang – hver for sig* ('Community singing – separately'), in which well-known musicians participate, now has regular viewing figures of 1.8m Danes – nearly a third of the population (5.6m). Song requests arrived from all over the country, including from the Prime Minister and the Royal Family; on submitting her song request, Crown Princess Mary wrote: 'Singing together is rooted deeply in the Danish psyche. *Morgensang* is reminding us that our community can sustain itself, even if we can't be together right now.'

Faber, who is the conductor of DR's Danish National Girls' Choir, commented: 'At a time like this, which feels so different and is extremely worrying for many, we need to reinforce a sense of community. 'This programme would not exist at all if people weren't singing along. When you sing with hundreds of others at the same time, you have the feeling that you are not alone.'

Denmark has a unique communal singing tradition, with an unparalleled treasure-trove of national songs. Danes sing together at birthday parties, in offices, at Christmas and on Midsummer's Eve. In September 1940, 700,000 citizens took part in a giant sing-along during the country's occupation by the Nazis; the coronavirus crisis is thought to have prompted the biggest acts of communal singing since then. *dr.dk*

▼ Leading the Danes in song: Phillip Faber



IN BRIEF

The **Eric Thompson Trust** is to make a grant of £400 to every conservatoire organ student in the UK. The award is in recognition of the fact that during the Covid-19 disruption organ students have lost income due to cancelled recitals and church services, while at the same time continuing to pay full-rate fees and rent. The grants will be paid automatically through the heads of the various institutions. The gesture is in memory of the Trust's founder, Eric Thompson, and his wife Dinah, who died in October 2019. bit.ly/2yp8wUA

The Académie André Marchal has announced the second edition of its competition '**The Youthful Organ**', which will take place in the Paris area on 19-21 Oct 2020. The competition has two categories: Benjamins (up to 13 yrs incl) and Juniors (14-17 yrs). The repertoire will evoke the 150th anniversary of the births of Tournemire and Vierne, and the 40th anniversary of the death of André Marchal. The jury comprises Véronique Le Guen (president), Philippe Brandeis, David Cassan, Françoise Dorner, and Haru Espinasse-Yamagami. Further details at academieandremarchal.org; contact academie.andre.marchal@gmail.com.

Application deadline: 15 Sep 2020.

On 15 Jun the 10,000-strong Stay at Home Choir began rehearsals to record five movements of Karl Jenkins's **The Armed Man**, marking the work's 20th anniversary this year. The final video performance will be accompanied by the World Orchestra for Peace, conducted by the composer and recorded before lockdown.

Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir 6, comprising over 17,000 singers, will give the premiere of the composer's *Sing Gently* on YouTube on 19 Jul. The project has been joined by 41,163 people in all, who have used learning tools, joined rehearsals and watched pre-recorded videos in ThinkTank. virtualchoir6.com.

IN BRIEF

Los Angeles Master Chorale is to compensate singers and orchestral players for wages lost due to concerts cancelled because of Covid-19. Musicians will continue to be compensated for future cancelled concerts.

The **Three Choirs Festival** has postponed this year's festival to 2021, when it will take place in Worcester from 24-31 Jul. People with bookings or ticket reservations for 2020 will be contacted by the box office and given the option of a full refund or a transfer of their reservation to 2021. The full 2021 programme will be confirmed later this year. 3choirs.org

The ORA Singers have launched a **£12,000 Emergency Composers' Fund** to provide work and income for composers during Covid-19. Eight composers will be commissioned to write choral reflections on eight different works of art chosen by Tate Modern from its collection, each receiving £1,500. The fund is open to all composers resident in the UK. To register interest, visit orasingers.co.uk.

The international **Festival of Flanders Antwerp**, AMUZ, is to run online this year. Under the headline 'Laus Polyphoniae 2020 #connects – Polyphony of Life', the festival will offer online activities from 21-30 Aug. The entire 2020 programme is now moved to 2022, from 19-28 Aug, with 2021's focus being the 500th anniversary of Josquin des Prez. amuz.be

Because of Covid-19, the **BBC Proms** First Night on 17 Jul will be a virtual concert including Iain Farrington's commissioned tribute to Beethoven. Archive recordings will be played on BBC Radio 3 every evening, plus Monday lunchtime concerts, a weekly Late Night Prom, and a televised Prom on Sundays on BBC Four. From 28 Aug to the Last Night on 12 Sep, musicians are expected to perform live at the Royal Albert Hall. <https://bbc.in/3heY1Vn>

ST ALBANS 2021



ROXANNA PANUFNIK

▲ Roxanna Panufnik will compose the commissioned work for 2021

THE 2021 ST ALBANS INTERNATIONAL ORGAN COMPETITIONS were launched on Monday 11 May.

The commissioned work for the 31st Interpretation Competition will be by Roxanna Panufnik; the six-minute piece will be premiered at the 2021 festival and performed by all Interpretation competitors. Finalists will perform a Handel concerto with St James' Baroque, directed by David Hill.

The Tournemire (Improvisation) Prize, substantially redesigned for 2021, will run alongside the Interpretation Competition. The semi-final will include performance to a silent film; improvisations based on Allegri's *Miserere* and a narration of 'Walpurgisnacht' from Goethe's *Faust*; and five contrasting variations on a chorale, provided with one hour's notice.

Jury members for 2021 are David Hill (UK), Bine Bryndorf (DK), Pieter van Dijk (NL), Rie Hiroe (JP), Todd Wilson (US), Franz Danksagmüller (AT/DE) and Jean-Baptiste Robin (FR).

Artistic director David Titterington commented: 'I am delighted to open our 31st competition to entries. More than ever in these current uncertain times, it will be so important to celebrate the very best of live performance with its most talented young organists. We look forward to receiving applications from all around the world, and to making our competitors truly welcome in St Albans.'

The competitions are open to organists of all nationalities born after 17 July 1988. Applications are now open at organfestival.com.

■ Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the start of the 2020-2021 concert series has been postponed till 21 November 2020, when IOF president Thomas Trotter will give a recital in St Albans Cathedral. Artistic director David Titterington gives a recital on 16 January 2021; both performances are being donated as fundraisers for the IOF.



PATRICK HOLLER

The Duyschot organ (1686) of the Westerkerk in Amsterdam, which was reconstructed in 1989-92 by Flentrop Orgelbouw, has now undergone major work by the Dutch builder. Most of the 3,800 organ pipes were removed from the organ, cleaned and improved where necessary, and the instrument has been technically checked. Due to Covid-19, the inauguration concert planned for 18 April was postponed, but the new cantor-organist, Evan Bogerd, streamed a pre-inauguration concert live via the church's YouTube channel, drawing several thousand viewers.

SUPPORTING THE ARTS

A £1.5M CREATIVE SUPPORT FUND has been created by the government of Northern Ireland for the region's struggling arts sector.

The fund provides cash aid for a diverse range of performing artists and community art organisations.

The Creative Support funding package comprises two strands:

- ▶ The Artists Emergency Programme offers grants of up to £5,000 for individual artists and creative practitioners who have lost their work as a result of Covid-19.
- ▶ The Organisations Emergency Programme offers grants of up to £25,000 for small and medium-sized organisations.

The fund is administered by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, which is contributing £500,000 of Lottery funding to the initiative.

■ Arts Council England has made £20m available for grants of up to £2,500 for individual creative practitioners affected by Covid-19 disruption; and £50m for grants of up to £35,000 for organisations. Details at artscouncil.co.uk.

■ A letter signed by 50 members of the House of Lords was published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 2 May urging the government to provide robust financial support to music and the performing arts, which 'face ruin' as a result of Covid-19.

The letter pointed out that the creative industries are worth £111bn to the UK economy every year, and detailed the severe impact of Covid-19 on the music industry, with venues and theatres closed, festivals and concerts cancelled and the majority of the self-employed workforce losing their income. It went on to urge the government to recognise that the music sector must be afforded urgent financial



UK PARLIAMENT

▲ The House of Lords: 50 members signed a letter calling on the government to provide financial support for music and the performing arts

support to ensure its survival and to prevent irreversible financial and cultural damage.

Deborah Annetts, chief executive of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, added: 'Without robust financial support, like the €50bn emergency programme introduced in Germany, the future of these industries is in peril. We continue to engage with the government to ensure no individuals or organisations are left behind in the wake of this crisis.'

YORK'S MINSTER SCHOOL CLOSES

THE MINSTER SCHOOL YORK has announced it is to close at the end of the summer term.

The preparatory school – which counts among its pupils the choristers of York Minster – has been running at 50 percent capacity for some years, requiring a heavy subsidy from the Chapter of York, the Minster's governing body. Now, as a result of Covid-19, which has closed the Minster's doors to visitors, the Chapter has suffered a £5.2m shortfall in projected income. Mrs Angela Mitchell, the school's headteacher, explained that 'TMS York and York Minster could unfortunately no longer manage the resulting financial shortfall and continue running the school as a going concern.'



CHOIRLAND.ORG.UK

▲ The end of an era: The Minster School York

The school's origins date back to 627AD, when it was founded as a 'song school' by Paulinus of York, the first Archbishop of York, to educate choristers at the Minster.

From September, choristers will attend the nearby St Peter's School, while continuing to be trained by the Minster's music department.

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UP AND RUNNING



▲ Andrea Sisti works on the new organ for Paris

MASCONI ORGANS REOPENED ITS DOORS ON 4 MAY, following seven weeks' closure due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In an episode mirroring that of hundreds of other organ builders worldwide, all activities were suspended when the company, based in Azzio in northern Italy, was forced to close its factory in March.

Andrea Mascioni told *C&O*: 'Nobody had access to the factory at all. We could do administration, but not much else. We've now resumed and are still on schedule. The government imposed many restrictions and safety procedures. Before entering the workshop, everyone's body temperature is checked with a laser thermometer; everyone must wear a mask and gloves, whatever they're doing; and at the end of a shift, everyone must

disinfect their tools and benches, personal tools, pipe mandrels, machines, everything.'

Current projects include a new practice organ for the Paris Conservatoire. Based on tonal and artistic planning by Conservatoire organ chairs Olivier Latry and Michel Bouvard, the instrument can accommodate all organ literature, but is particularly designed to be 'an ultra-modern training tool for students who will eventually need to improvise regularly in much larger buildings,' says Mascioni. The 15 French symphonic ranks will be distributed over three manuals, and enclosed in a double expression box. Transmission is electric, and with advanced functions: manuals can be switched, and the pedal division can be split between bass and treble. There will also be sustaining chord functions, pizzicato, and divisible solo/accompaniment features within manuals. The pitches of the couplers can be programmed, and players can programme a fixed delay between touching a key and hearing a sound, recreating to a degree the delay in large cathedrals where organist and pipes are far apart.

Installation is expected by the end of 2020. mascioni-organs.com

LEEDS ONLINE

LEEDS INTERNATIONAL ORGAN FESTIVAL launched LIOF Live on Monday 11 May.

The Festival, which presents lunchtime organ recitals, evening concerts, masterclasses and lectures from May to July, has postponed its full programme until 2021 due to Covid-19. Instead, this year it has presented tracks from albums released featuring the booked organists. Recitals still to come in the series are by Thomas Leech (29 June), Sean Montgomery (6 July) and Alessandro Bianchi (13 July). All recitals are at 1.15pm and can be heard at lioflive.org.uk.

Meanwhile, a primary schools' organ day booked into Leeds Town Hall for early July, which had 600+ children signed up before lockdown, has been postponed. David Pipe, LIOF artistic director and director of the Diocese of Leeds Organ School, told *C&O* he hopes it will be possible to hold this on 3 November instead. The event will feature WOOFYT workshops throughout the day (woofyt.org), with a lunchtime concert of family-friendly organ music. Further updates are at leedsiof.org (Festival) and dioceseofleedsmusic.org.uk (schools' day).



NYCGB PARTNERS



▲ NYCGB Young Composers at a Dorico workshop

NATIONAL YOUTH CHOIRS OF GREAT BRITAIN (NYCGB) has announced two new partnerships for its Young Composers Scheme: Steinberg Media Technologies (Technology Partner and Innovation Grant Sponsor) and Stainer & Bell (Publishing Partner and Innovation Grant Sponsor).

Steinberg will provide a package of benefits and financial support to the young composers, including free licences and training for Dorico Pro notation software, which also has a play-back function.

Stainer & Bell, an independent music publisher, will help to publish and promote four new works by young composers across both the 2019 and 2020 cohorts.

Daniel Spreadbury, Steinberg's product marketing manager, said: 'Supporting young musicians as they develop their skills and confidence as composers and performers is crucial to us at Steinberg, particularly when music education has been facing challenges on every side.'

Anthony Kearns, Stainer & Bell's managing director, said: 'Stainer & Bell has a proud tradition of nurturing and supporting emerging composers, and we're especially looking forward to collaborating with these gifted young writers.'

Ben Parry, NYCGB artistic director and principal conductor, added: 'We are absolutely thrilled to have established these two wonderful and unique partnerships. Both organisations have a vast specialist knowledge and expertise that will be of huge benefit to the professional development of our talented Young Composers. We look forward to developing these exciting partnerships over the coming years.' nycgb.org.uk

ORGAN RECITALS

Despite so many recitals having been cancelled, the following are expected still to take place, but readers are strongly advised to check beforehand.



▲ The Richards, Fowkes organ in St George's, Hanover Square, London W1

Dursley, St James-the-Great at 11am

David Davies (25 Jul), Carl Grainger (29 Aug) 01453 549280

Folkestone, Holy Trinity at 7.30pm

D'Arcy Trinkwon (26 Jul) 01303 256040

Hereford Cathedral at 3.05pm

Peter Dyke (11 Jul), Jonathan Lee (8 Aug); Tuesdays at 1.15. 01432 374238

London N1, St John's, Duncan Terrace at 7.30pm

Katelyn Emerson (25 Jul) 020 7226 1218

London NW1, St Marylebone Parish Church at 4pm

Adrian Gunning (5 Jul) 020 7226 1218

London SE1, St John's, Upper Norwood at 7.30pm

Adrian Gunning (16 Jul) 020 7226 1218

London W1, Grosvenor Chapel at 1.10pm

Stefan Donner (14 Jul), Loreto Aramendi (28 Jul), Robert Patterson (11 Aug), Michael Overbury (25 Aug) 020 7499 1684

London W1, St George's, Hanover Square at 1.10pm

Weston Jennings (7 Jul), Richard Hobson (21 Jul), Stratos Gioulmpanoglou & Jonathan Bunney (4 Aug), Paulo Silva (18 Aug) 020 7629 0874

Reading Town Hall at 1pm

David Quinn (20 Jul) 0118 960 6060

Seaford, St Laurence at 1pm

D'Arcy Trinkwon (29 Jul) 01323 894216

NORTHERN IRELAND ORGAN COMPETITION POSTPONED



▲ NIIOC jury chair Sophie-Véronique Cauchefer-Choplin

THE 10TH NORTHERN IRELAND INTERNATIONAL ORGAN COMPETITION (NIIOC), which was scheduled to take place in Armagh on 23-26 August, has been provisionally postponed to 23-24 October 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A streamlined version of the competition will run concurrently with a 'taster' version of the Charles Wood Summer School, which has also been postponed from August.

The jury for the organ competition will now be chaired by Sophie-Véronique Cauchefer-Choplin (FR), professor of organ studies at the Royal College of Music, London; she replaces David Titterton, who has a prior commitment on the new dates. Cauchefer-Choplin will be joined by Simon Harden, organist and director of music at Christ Church Cathedral, Waterford, and regular jury member David Hill, artistic director of the Bach Choir, Yale Schola Cantorum, and the Charles Wood Summer School, which runs concurrently with the organ competition.

Only the Senior section of the competition and a masterclass by Professor Cauchefer-Choplin will take now place, on Friday 23 October and Saturday 24 October respectively.

NIIOC chair Richard Yarr said: 'The health and safety of our competitors, and all those who visit, is of paramount importance. We very much hope that the conditions will be right in October to choose our tenth winner. We will, of course, monitor all official advice and make a further announcement in mid-August.'

NIIOC is open to organists aged 21 and under, but a temporary change to the rules – for this year only – means that performers who would have been eligible to take part on the original dates, but would be 22 by 24 October, will still be allowed to apply. Shortlisting will be by reference rather than by submission of recordings, again for this year only. Full details and updates can be found at niioc.com.

■ Plans are under way to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the competition in 2021, including showcasing the first ten winners, many of whom are now players of international standing, including Ben Comeau, Ben Bloor, Andrew Forbes, Mona Rozdestvenstkyte and Sebastian Heindl.

Please email items for News and Letters to the Editor for publication in future issues to maggie.hamilton@markallengroup.com, or post to The Editor, Choir & Organ, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB, UK.

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The Alverna Trust Limited was formed in 2020 to raise awareness of *Richard Blackford's* choral music and to provide grants to cover costs associated with performances.

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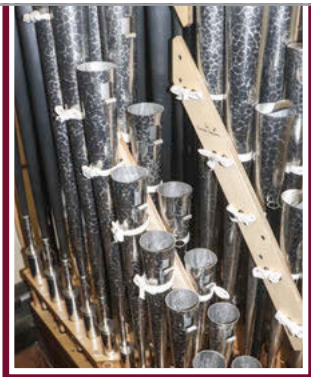
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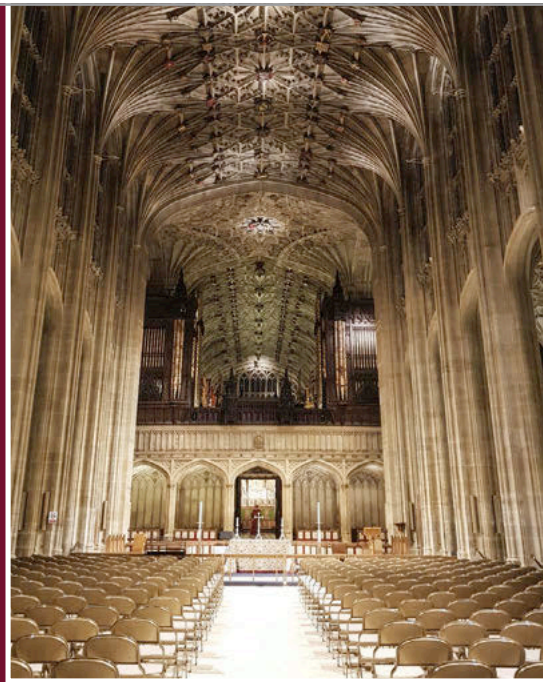
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Mystery tour

Magical, luminous, transparent – just some of the words used to describe the music of Judith Weir. **David Wordsworth** surveys her choral canon

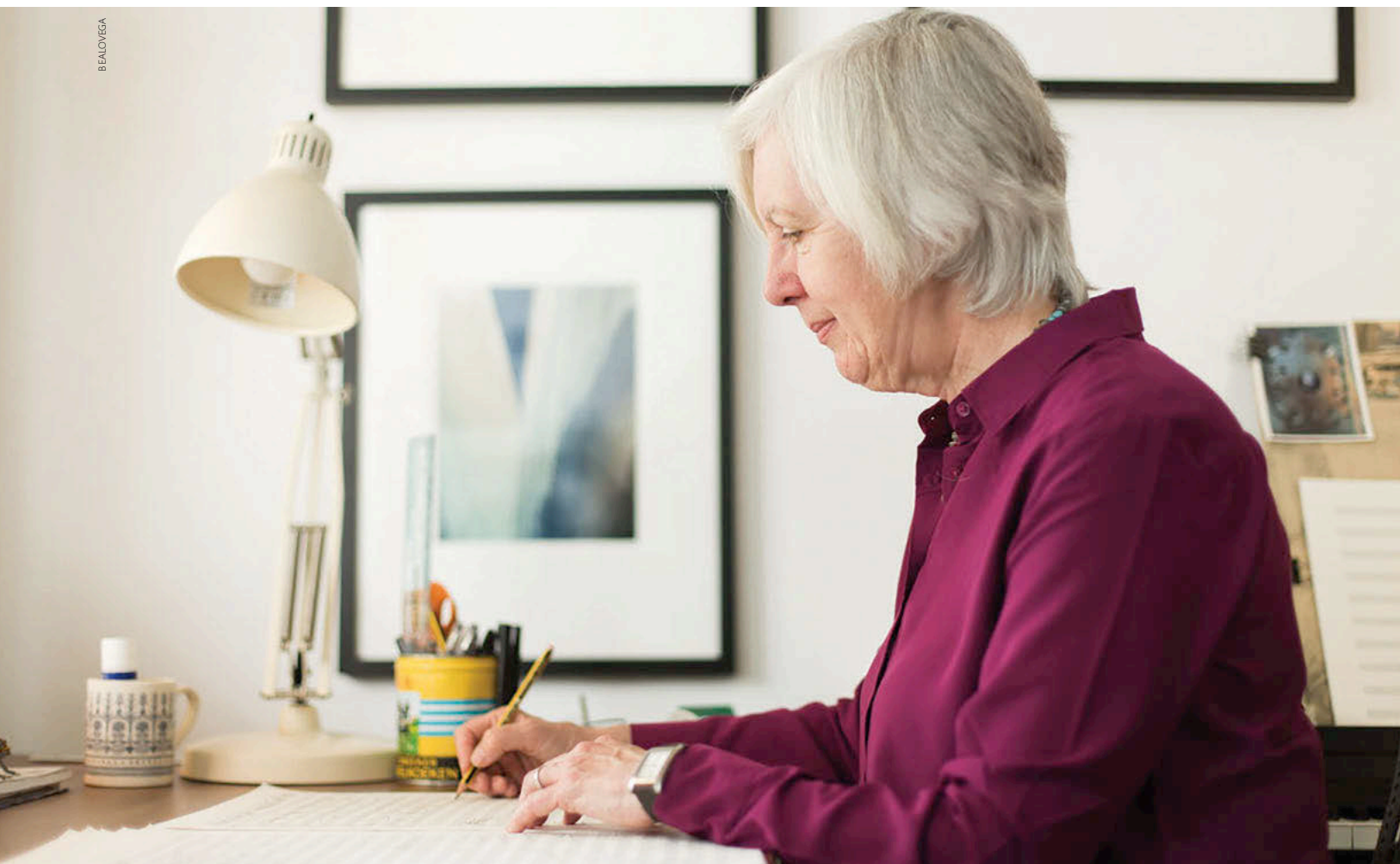
It was a writer – Heinrich Heine, no less – rather than a composer who declared that ‘When words leave off, music begins.’ With that in mind, trying to come up with merely descriptive terms to give an impression of music as distinctive as Judith Weir’s would appear to be a non-starter. However, it is interesting when reading about her music to note the sort of words that constantly reappear – magical, luminous, richly communicative, transparent, for example. The critic Andrew Clements has described how Weir has ‘the knack of making simple musical ideas appear freshly mysterious’, pointing to a composer whose musical personality is recognisable within a few bars, a particular turn of phrase or the way she voices a chord.

Judith Weir was born in Cambridge to Scottish parents and had early lessons with Sir John Tavener (whom she still describes as being a major influence on

her musical life) while still at school, before studying with Robin Holloway at King’s College, Cambridge, and later with Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood. She played oboe in the National Youth Orchestra and recalls that she didn’t sing in choirs or, indeed, have any particular interest in choral music, only much later coming to recognise the powerful force that is choral music at both a professional and amateur level.

Much of Weir’s earliest success was in the field of opera and music theatre, ranging from *King Harald’s Saga* (1979), an opera for solo soprano (the soprano soloist taking on eight different roles) to *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987), illustrating her early interest in theatre and music from non-western traditions, as well as an opera for young people, *The Black Spider* (1985) and an opera for television, *Armida* (2005). Drama and story-telling is central to her music, whether this

▼ ‘Making simple ideas appear freshly mysterious’: Master of the Queen’s Music Judith Weir



- *Illuminare, Jerusalem*, commissioned for the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge in 1985; the refrain makes a dramatic impact
© 1985 NOVELLO & CO. / PRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF HAL LEONARD EUROPE LIMITED
- 'Love bade me welcome' from *Two Human Hymns* (1995) has a bubbling, florid organ accompaniment
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◀ music be for the stage, concert hall or even the church. For a composer of Weir's generation it would be true to say that choral music might have been seen as a 'poor relation', younger composers being rather more keen on getting exposure with music for the stage or for specialist ensembles or orchestras. Thankfully there has been a steady increase in Weir's choral works over the years, many resulting from her involvement with the Spitalfields Festival in London (she was artistic director from 1995-2000), her role as composer-in-association with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (1995-98), and more recently as a result of her appointment as Master of the Queen's Music in 2014 and associate composer of the BBC Singers (2015-19).

from above (1984) and *Illuminare, Jerusalem* (1985), commissioned for the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge – a two-minute distillation of Weir's compositional approach. The choir sings the medieval text to spiky, distinctly medieval-sounding music, but the real *coup de théâtre* is reserved fittingly for the most important part of the text, the refrain 'Illuminare, Jerusalem' – the second word is slightly drawn out on every appearance, with 'Illuminare' mysteriously shadowed by the organ (the instrument's only appearance in the piece). Only two bars of music, but once heard, never forgotten. Weir recently became the only composer to be commissioned twice for this most famous of choral occasions and

Weir's accompaniments are a model of restraint, at times pointed and ironic, at others providing a mellow cushion

Weir's earliest acknowledged choral work is *Ascending into Heaven* (1983). Commissioned by St Albans International Organ Festival and so unsurprisingly giving the organ a prominent role, the work focuses on the accompanying instrument spending a good deal of time doing exactly as the title suggests. An early piece this may be, but recognisable fingerprints are already there: a careful consideration of text, a concern for clarity, economy of gesture and musical line, a quiet, wry sense of humour when appropriate and ensuring the words are absolutely clear at all times. Her accompaniments are the model of restraint, sometimes pointed and ironic, at other times giving a mellow cushion on which the melodic lines can sit, with never a wasted note in sight.

Ascending into Heaven was closely followed by the short Advent anthem *Drop down, ye heavens,*

contributed *O Mercy Divine* for the 2018 service. This carol is accompanied by a solo cello and sets naively beautiful words by Charles Wesley, the verses of the text broken up by the improvisatory musings of the solo instrument. *My Guardian Angel* (1997) has become another popular seasonal piece, setting a short text by William Blake, and inviting audience participation, the choir weaving counterpoint around the audience's simple 14-bar 'Alleluia'.

Weir's association with the CBSO brought two major choral works. The composer calls *We are Shadows* (1999) 'a series of reflections on the impermanence of life'. Scored for SATB chorus, children's choir and orchestra, although certainly not a Requiem in the conventional sense, the six movements concern themselves, sometimes sardonically, sometimes spiritually, with different views of death. The focus is for

the most part on joy and the possibilities of life, as the composer puts it, 'lived in other dimensions than the earthly one we know.' *Storm* (1997) is a magical suite of pieces setting words from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* for children's voices, women's chorus and a glittering ensemble of flutes, cellos and three percussion players, from which Weir conjures up a wonderful colourful commentary. Setting some of the most famous words in the English language – 'Our revels now are ended ... We are such stuff / As dreams are made on' – seemed to hold no terror for this composer, the concise vocal lines and glints of colour from the instrumental ensemble making the setting as natural as it could possibly be.

Music for young performers has become an important strand in Weir's output, conveying an obvious delight in adapting her personal language in a way that communicates to her performers. *Little tree* (2003), setting poems by e.e.cummings, was written for the Young People's Chorus of New York City and requires a confident three-part choir of upper voices, with the discreet support of a marimba. *Day by Day* (2018) is a rather more straightforward affair for high voices and piano, setting translations of Japanese poetry. *The Big Picture* (2017), commissioned for the re-opening of Aberdeen Art Gallery, is an example of Weir responding to a particular occasion and thinking carefully about her performers and texts – here the performers (an SATB choir, unison choir, clarinet, percussion and keyboard) are, as far as possible, separated on different levels; the texts, by writers as varied as Henry VIII (allegedly), Wallace Stevens and Christina Rossetti, are concerned with colour and its importance in both visual art and music.

Concrete (2007), written for the BBC Composer Weekend that celebrated Weir's music in January 2008, is described by the composer as a 'choral motet' and the work is concerned with the Barbican building itself – 'an imaginary excavation of the Barbican Centre, burrowing though 2,500 years of historical rubble.' The work incorporates spoken text from the diary of John Evelyn (describing the 1666 Great Fire of London), a survey of London churches, interviews with Londoners in the 1800s, and words from a 1952 prospectus for the Barbican development; it culminates with cries of 'Resurgam' ('I will rise again'), a word discovered by Sir Christopher Wren on one of the remaining stones of the old St Paul's Cathedral, burned down in the Great Fire. *Concrete* may appear to be a site-specific piece, but it would easily fit into any concert concerned with architecture or cities.

Unusually, the six-minute *Sanctus* (1995) is part of a larger work, a *Requiem of Reconciliation* commissioned from 14 different composers by the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart and its director Helmut Rilling, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the ending

of the second world war. Weir's contribution, for two female soloists, chorus and orchestra, can be performed with equal success by itself; it quotes the Gregorian chant associated with the text and makes ingenious use of the quintuplet figure built from the words 'Sanctus Dominus' and 'Deus Sabbaoth'.

Profitable and rewarding associations with virtuoso chamber choirs have brought a number of remarkable works. *Missa el Cid* (1988) was originally written for a BBC TV film and sung by a ten-voice ensemble, with narrator; it was later sung by the New London Chamber Choir and Exaudi, among others. It explores the rather unlikely contrast and relationship between religion and warfare, combining the Latin liturgy with the story of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (El Cid), the Castilian knight and warlord in medieval Spain. Over the years, a long relationship with the BBC Singers has inspired *At the Ends of the Earth* (1999), a glittering fantasy for mixed choir, harp and percussion based on Perotin's *Viderunt omnes*; *In the Land of Uz* (2017), a mini-oratorio or music drama focusing on the Book of Job, with a beguiling ensemble of viola, double bass, soprano saxophone, trumpet, tuba and organ, which vividly illustrate the text but also take on characters in the story; and most recently, *blue hills beyond blue hills* (2019), a major 35-minute work accompanied by string quartet, which both describes the passing of time and is a cycle through the seasons of the year. Returning to more conventional texts, *Psalm 148* (2008) written for the Choir of Gonville & Caius, Cambridge, sees a solo trombone heralding the choir's praises to God, but also vividly illustrating the beasts, creeping things and dragons that are mentioned in the text.

The metaphysical poets, in particular George Herbert, have inspired Weir on several occasions; his poems, she says, though clearly of a Christian nature, are just as

▼ Weir has been inspired by the metaphysical poets, and in particular George Herbert



B. BALOVICS



BEADVEGA

▲ With little experience of Anglican liturgy for much of her life, Weir accepted an invitation to compose a Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis in a 'spirit of exploration'

◁ applicable and meaningful to all, believers or not. The first of the *Two Human Hymns* (1995) sets Herbert's well-known 'Love bade me welcome', the second 'Like to the falling of a Starre' by Herbert's close contemporary Henry King. They are literally little hymns, set over bubbling, florid organ accompaniments, the endings entirely characteristic, seemingly understated – for this composer, the double-bar is less of a full-stop, rather someone shutting a window on the sound. *Vertue* (2005) is a rather more challenging triptych of short pieces for double choir written for The Cardinal's Musick and setting three of Herbert's best-known poems, 'Vertue', 'Antiphon' and 'Prayer'. On a much larger scale, at least in terms of performers, is *Stars, Night, Music and Light*, setting just two lines from Herbert's 'Man' – 'Night draws the curtain, which the sun withdraws; Music and light attend our head' – an appropriate text for a commission for the First Night of the Proms in the vast space of the Royal Albert Hall. The composer recalls that she was asked to 'write something loud' for large chorus, organ and huge orchestra; the four-minute score is littered with the instructions *f*, *ff* and even *fff* – unusual for this composer, but it takes on an epic bewitching grandeur far in excess of its duration. (A reduced version by myself in 2018, with the accompaniment rescored for two pianos and timpani, attempts to keep some of these epic qualities, but makes more frequent performances possible.)

For unaccompanied choir, but of a clearly secular nature, is *The Song Sung True* (2013), an engaging and witty setting of four texts celebrating the act of singing. Especially effective are the first song – a sort of choral tongue-twister focusing on the word 'sing', a fitting homage to Gertrude Stein by the Glaswegian writer Alan Spence – and the third, a beautifully still setting of 'Orpheus with his Lute'. The suite culminates in Edward Lear's 'There was an old man of the Isles', marked crotchet = 112 (or even faster).

Weir's appointment as Master of the Queen's Music has brought a number of short anthems for state occasions, including *His Mercy Endureth for Ever* (2015) to commemorate the 70th anniversary of VE Day; *Praise Him with Trumpets* (2015), commissioned for the 500th anniversary of Hampton Court Palace; *The True Light* (2018) to commemorate the end of the first world war; and *I love all beauteous things* (2016), written for the 90th birthday of HM The Queen. Though it must be difficult not to dissolve into mannerism or cliché when writing music for these events, Weir still steers her steady and resolute path – clear melodic lines, crisp rhythms, organ accompaniments that are full of character and imagination, and pieces that are worlds away from so much ceremonial music of the past. The same qualities are clear in two of Weir's settings of Latin liturgical texts – *Ave Regina caelorum* (2011) and the Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis (2011) (both for unaccompanied choir). She says of the latter that 'having had very little personal experience of the Anglican liturgy for much of my life, it was in a spirit of exploration that I accepted the invitation.' Once again the textures allow the words to be clearly audible, and the settings gleefully blow the dust off so many versions of these well-worn texts.

Music that can be sweet but never saccharine, music that can be both profound and quirky, music that is both expressive and exotic, dark and luminous, rhythmic, transparent and richly communicative – music that does indeed take over when words begin to fail. ■

The music of Judith Weir is published exclusively by Chester Music Limited and Novello & Co: wisemusic.com. To buy scores, visit musicroom.com/judith-weir. See also Readers' Offers, p.26.

David Wordsworth's recent concerts include performances at the Concertgebouw and Musikverein. He has directed the Addison Singers for over 20 years.

Support act

Suppliers of materials and parts to organ builders are usually offstage and unseen.

Jonathan Ambrosino considers their important role, and reflects on how the coronavirus has highlighted their contribution to the organ building ecosystem

In this series about trends in North American organ building, I had always planned an article about suppliers — those unseen support companies who seem ever more present in the act of today's instrument-making. The advent of Covid-19 brings the role of suppliers into sharper focus because of snap shop closures, inconsistent across nations as the disease affects economies in a staggered fashion. It points out the degree to which most shops rely on suppliers, and how interdependent the worldwide organ building ecosystem has become.

In the period of considerable industry (1860-1960), most shops made almost everything in house. Certain factories (Casavant, Schantz) even made their own blowers. Prior to the advent of solid-state control systems, most shops manufactured proprietary electro-pneumatic and electro-mechanical relays and switchgear, some of it (Kimball, Compton) extremely beautiful. Others, coming late to that party, had no desire to conceive and engineer such equipment from scratch. This explains the presence of Skinner-type switchgear in Willis consoles for Farm Street Church, London (1926) and Saint George's Hall, Liverpool (1931) during the period of technology and ideas sharing between those two firms. A generation later, when it seemed that solid-state technology had much to offer the organ builder, certain builders developed their own systems. Lawrence Phelps was one, thanks to the inventive Clive Webster; Robert Noehren had a punch-card reader that was probably ►

► Jay Palmer of A.R. Schopp's Sons, Inc., confirms the measurements of a 32ft reed resonator





◀ the first combination action in which, while not exactly multi-level, combinations could be automatically recalled rather than laboriously re-set. For 1964, this was heady stuff. Today, nearly all builders turn to trusted manufacturers of control systems and combination actions. One exception is Rieger, who make their own system and offer it to other builders.

The obvious pride in a builder's making all parts of an organ comes with the challenge of having a small staff of wide-ranging talent coupled to comfort with financial exposure. Tooling up to make all parts of a pipe organ presents no small expense, and can present a financial black hole when things go wrong. In the days of larger shops, greater efficiencies were possible, with actual departments and staff doing nothing but, for example, pipe-making. When the workforce is below a certain size, or a company has a high overhead, outsourcing can be appealing, essential, or both.

example, the Noltes in Wisconsin make only wood pipes, while Mark Matters makes control/combination systems out of the Reuter factory in Kansas. The principal outfit, however, is Organ Supply Industries in Erie, Pennsylvania, whose staff of around 50 manufacture most parts of any organ, save blowers. Another large supplier is A.R. Schopp's Sons, in Alliance, Ohio. A pipe shop with late 19th-century roots, Schopp's branched out to windchests and wood pipes several decades ago. Here again, suppliers sell convenience along with ability. If you are having Schopp's build, for example, a Pedal 32-16ft reed unit, there is understandable convenience and economy to their making the chest and racking for it at the same time. Trivo in Maryland, whose staff are alumni of the Möller plant, have been building and voicing reed pipes for decades.

As I write, many US shops are shuttered, due to governmental orders for citizens to shelter-in-place or non-essential businesses

Today, most builders turn to trusted manufacturers of control systems and combination actions

In Europe, the most wide-ranging supplier is Laukhuff, in Weikersheim, Germany. They are as complete an organ building shop as any, supplying essentially any individual element, or a complete instrument, to the buyer. Otto Heuss specialises in action parts and certain components, while Stinkens makes only pipes. England's equivalent to Laukhuff is P&S Organ Supply in Brandon, who make a wide range of organ components. Kimber-Allen has been around for decades supplying electromagnets, relays and switchgear; and, of course, Solid State Organ Systems was an early pioneer in control and combination systems. Does Penny's Mill in Wiltshire make every beautiful new English organ case? Sometimes it seems so.

The United States has its own coterie of suppliers, some highly specialised. For

to cease work until further notice. Of course, no concern likes to be called non-essential, after sacrificing much to build so highly individualised a business as an organ shop. Perhaps ironically, most workshops have the kind of space that, in theory, permits safe physical distance for workers. But it becomes murky. For example, the number of washrooms and sinks required under normal regulation may not be sufficient to this new norm of constant sanitisation. And plentiful workspace helps only in the making of individual elements: when it comes time to pre-assemble an instrument, having workers remain six feet apart, particularly huffing and puffing to place larger elements into position, isn't the sort of physical separation health experts have stressed. (This situation has much in common with what we have read about the need for singers to be considerably farther

◀ In the workshop of A.R. Schopp's Sons, Inc., in Alliance, Ohio (from top) Ron Miller solders a pipe foot; Lynn Johnson confirms a proportional measurement; Keith Murphy checks stopper tightness on a new Bourdon rank; Brian Rudolph solders the mouth of a 16ft Principal (PHOTOS COURTESY A.R. SCHOPP'S SONS, INC.); (bottom) reed pipes from a 1926 Skinner residence organ being reconditioned at the shop of reed pipe specialist Samuel Hughes in East Windsor, Connecticut (PHOTO BY SAMUEL HUGHES)

apart than six feet, because of increased breath-flow and the inability to sing while wearing masks). The fortunate organ shop in this period enjoys an alignment of factors: capital reserve, signed work, and a project in its earlier stages, where workers can be alone at their benches fabricating individual components.

The financial equation is particularly challenging. While the US government did offer significant relief to small businesses in the form of the Paycheck Protection Plan, its rollout was mired in red tape. Many who diligently applied either didn't get anything, didn't get enough to help, or got it with enough of a delay to create other issues. Those businesses in relationship with smaller banks seemed to get prompter service than those using national chain-banks. If one has an established shop in a less expensive area, with ownership of the property and buildings, it may be easier to absorb the temporary work stoppage. For those in urban areas with high rent, the moment is an awful blow: unable to have staff producing the work that justifies the overhead. And for those builders with nearly complete organs in the shop, when will they be able to install them? Resumption of travel and church access is a wildcard. 'Suddenly, having the organ for Pentecost doesn't seem as important as it did a few weeks ago,' a rector told one colleague.

A further hardship came for those who tune and maintain organs, which includes a number of organ building and rebuilding shops. Either under my own banner or in the service of my Bostonian colleagues, I look in on some 40 organs, almost all of which receive some form of Lenten visit. We got to 12 before it became obvious that any pre-Easter tuning would be a waste of their money and our time. For firms that service 100 to 200 instruments, the revenue loss is truly significant, made no easier by reshuffling to figure out how to fill the time with shop work when access to churches is still an enormous question mark.

And finally, we come back to the

suppliers. If your shop can remain open, but things you need are held up by a supplier work stoppage, the obstacle is real. One firm, Columbia Organ Leathers, was able to remain somewhat open, as they supply leather used in medical equipment. Others, such as Organ Supply Industries, had to shut, but were still able to fulfil small orders with a skeletal staff on limited hours. They reopened on 18 May, but hardly with bedrock certainty. If the restarting of commerce and industry leads to a resurgence of infection, mayors and governors may once again issue work-stop and shelter-in-place orders. In some ways, it is the one-person suppliers who have fared best. I'm thinking specifically of three people who specialise in reed-pipe reconditioning and voicing – Christopher Broome, Samuel Hughes, and Fred Oyster. Cease-work orders haven't generally applied to sole proprietors or the principals in a business, and they have been fortunate to keep plugging away at the workload.

At the time of writing, more than 40 million people (11 percent of the population) have filed for unemployment in the United States, a number not seen since the Great Depression. It's entirely too soon to know if the impact is an awful but temporary blip, or a seismic, long-term rupture. Churches and musical organisations have scrambled to remain visible and relevant. When the worst of this crisis is over – and it seems that any 'return to normal' will be, at best, incremental and jagged – both the builder and the customer of the pipe organ will post-process this moment to ponder whether there is any way to prepare for another such shock to the system.

And, where suppliers are concerned, having even one of them temporarily closed offers a stark picture of what happens when a single link in the chain is broken. ■

Jonathan Ambrosino is a Boston-based tuner-technician, who works nationally as a consultant and tonal finisher. He has written for Choir & Organ since 1998.



► (from top) Christopher Broome working on a reconditioned 1934 Austin Trumpet at his East Granby, Connecticut workshop; detail of the reconditioned pipes in the Broome workshop (PHOTOS COURTESY CHRISTOPHER BROOME); at Organ Supply Industries in Erie, Pennsylvania, Phouthong Inthavong works on a new reed pipe; the shop floor with a number of new windchests in preparation, showing worker Daniel Mozdy; David Wasson reconditions a windchest from an M.P. Möller organ (PHOTOS COURTESY BRYAN TIMM)

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Not just an ornament

The Habsburg dynasty – monarchs in Europe for nearly 650 years – reached its apogee during the renaissance. Successive emperors commissioned a vast treasury of music, which is coming back to light thanks to vocal ensemble Cinquecento. **Rebecca Tavener** reports

Many visitors to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna make a beeline for its extraordinary collection of renaissance masterpieces, including Benvenuto Cellini's golden salt cellar and celebrated paintings by the Breughels. Adopt a questioning look and whisper the name 'Arcimboldo' and an attendant may whisk you with evident pride to the side galleries, where weird and wonderful 'grotesque' portrait heads, ingeniously constructed from depictions of fruits, animals, fish, flowers and more, are hung. These mysterious works were commissioned by the deranged Habsburg emperor Rudolf II and feature as the cover images on the revelatory, superbly realised renaissance Habsburg series of recordings from the male-voice quintet Cinquecento.

Who were the Habsburgs? If you saw Simon Sebag Montefiore's superb documentaries for the BBC you'll have been introduced to these chancers, entrepreneurs, statesmen, madmen, Holy Roman Emperors (temporal guardians of the Church from spiritual and martial threats such as Lutheranism and the Ottoman Empire) and leading proponents of the Counter-Reformation. They did power and patronage like few others, and – thanks to reckless inbreeding – carried their (deformed in some cases) lantern jaws and occasional lunacy through generations. Music, ignored by some and adored by others, was essential to their pomp and propaganda. For many decades they were the figureheads of the first European union.

To be taken seriously as a cultured renaissance prince, music was essential. Baldassare Castiglione, Italian intellectual and diplomat, friend of emperor Charles V, describes the nobility of music in his influential book *Il Cortigione* ("The Courtier"):

‘... the courtier should be able to read music and play several instruments ... there is no better way to soothe the soul and raise the spirits than through music ...

► Giuseppe Arcimboldo's painting (1590-91) uses flowers, fruits and vegetables to portray Rudolf II as Vertumnus, Roman God of the seasons



GIUSEPPE ARCIMBOLDI 1591 SKOKLOSTERS SLOTT

The Habsburgs at the peak of power



▲ The Habsburg double eagle adorns the banner of the Holy Roman Emperor

Charles V (1500-58) inherited vast territories – not just the massive swathe of central Europe we associate most closely with the dynasty, but also the Netherlands, Spain and, by extension, a rich slice of the New World. Holy Roman Emperor at 21, he retired at 56, exhausted from the stress of dealing with Martin Luther and the looming Ottoman threat. He was immensely capable in spite of a terrible childhood and lunatic mother. As Edward Crankshaw

put it in his book *The Habsburgs* (1971, Washburn Books), 'the story of his life may be seen as the failure of the richest and most powerful man in the world to impose an international religious and secular order'.

Charles divided his impossibly large empire between two heirs: **Ferdinand I**, his brother, and **Philip II**, his son. Philip took over Spain and the Netherlands and, unlike most of the Habsburgs, had a cloth ear in spite of having more music dedicated to him than any other renaissance monarch. We know him best, of course, for his ill-fated union with Mary Tudor and the Armada he sent against her sister. Ferdinand, by contrast, was passionate about music and had helped his brother raise the cultural status of the Viennese court. With his death in 1564, the hitherto strong and fairly stable ruling line began to lose its way. Having foreseen trouble, Ferdinand further divided their territory, giving younger sons rule over significant areas before allowing the eldest, Maximilian II, to be his official heir.

Dissipated, rebellious and intellectually enquiring, **Maximilian II** (1527-76) set aside the dynastic (although nominally elected, being Holy Roman Emperor became a Habsburg title) mission to protect the Church at all costs, and began to entertain an interest in Lutheranism. As he wrote to a friend, 'religious matters will not be settled by the sword nor by force, but with God's word and by Christian agreement and justice'. His death at the age of 49 was a disaster for Europe, and any hope of religious rapprochement was lost when he was succeeded by his dangerously unstable son, Rudolf II.

Inheritor of his great-grandmother's derangement, twice over from parents who were first cousins, **Rudolf II** (1552-1612) was sensitive, imaginative and superstitious. His obsession with the arts and sciences far exceeded any will to engage in the practice of ruling. He vacillated about the Ottoman threat and enraged large tracts of the empire with impossible attempts to reverse his father's tolerance and impose Roman Catholic orthodoxy. He set up court in Prague and kept a menagerie of beasts and birds wandering freely about the castle. If it were not for him, astronomers Tycho Brahe and Johan Kepler might not have found a patron of such wealth and power, and the Breughels and Arcimboldos in the Kunsthistorisches Museum would not have been commissioned. Eventually, having no children but psychologically incapable of relinquishing an iota of his imperial dignity, he was forced to allow his brother Matthias to take over as de facto ruler. Becoming emperor after Rudolf's death, **Matthias**, also childless, made no better a job of ruling, and these decades of weakness led to the tragedy of the 30 Years War (1618-48).

◀ Music likewise promotes habits of harmony and virtue in the individual and should therefore be learned beginning in childhood ... music is not just an ornament but a necessity ... The ideal courtier, however, should not give the impression that music is his main occupation in life.'

The Habsburgs could spend vast sums on their court and chapel music, headhunting the most talented composers, often from the Low Countries and intellectual hot spots like the University of Leuven/Louvain. Look left for a miniaturised, ultra-potted history of the emperors who left behind so rich a treasury of sacred polyphony that musicologists are still far from finding its end.

The idea of a harmonious Europe might be a metaphor for the vocal ensemble Cinquecento. Three of the singers live in Austria, but hail from Austria, Belgium and the UK; the German singer lives in Spain; and the Swiss member lives in Germany. They often rehearse in Vienna, but the majority of their concerts are throughout Europe – how their freedom of movement between Europe's countries will be affected by Brexit is a concern. They arrived

The Habsburgs spent vast sums on their court and chapel music, headhunting the most talented composers

on the musical scene in 2006 with their masterful debut CD, *Music for the Court of Maximilian II*, and this has led to numerous premiere recordings of hitherto little-known Habsburg music, powered by scholarship and pioneering exploration of unjustly neglected repertoire. Much of that musicological work comes from the British member, Tim Scott Whiteley (baritone), who is at pains to point out that he is not the group's artistic director, even though he makes so many of their performing editions. He enjoys that side of things: 'There is a great satisfaction in jigsaw-puzzling the source material together into a modern score and hearing the music for the first time (probably the first time since the 16th century, in some cases). You may not have just reconstructed a masterpiece, but you have breathed new life into a forgotten work of significant musical value and given it a chance of reaching a modern audience.'

The composers are mostly not household names: have you heard of Guyot, De Cleve, Schoendorff or Vaet? Even Regnart and Philippe De Monte are not considered 'mainstream'. We have Scott Whiteley to thank for their revival: 'Around about the same



THERESA PEWAL

▲ Cinquecento, 'a metaphor for the idea of a harmonious Europe': (l to r) Achim Schulz, Ulfried Staber, Tore Tom Denys, Tim Scott Whiteley, Terry Wey

time that I moved to Vienna in 2004, I discovered that a little-known Franco-Flemish composer, Jacobus Vaet (c.1529-67), had written a Mass setting using harmonic material from Clemens Non Papa's luminous seven-voice motet *Ego flos campi*. I was fascinated to find out who this unknown composer was. That no one had really heard of him until recently, I find extraordinary. Here we have a composer who is consistently imaginative and innovative for his time; a composer whose death was mourned in a lament (sadly, no longer extant) by Lassus; a composer who held one of the most prestigious musical positions in Europe by the age of 25. He would surely have joined the likes of Lassus and Palestrina in the history books, had he not died at the age of around 37.

So who were these magnificent musical minds, often inspired by each other, who adorned the mightiest European empire with sonic splendour? Vaet, winner of a scholarship to Leuven University, was working for Charles V as a tenor by 1550, and by 1554 was Kapellmeister to Archduke Maximilian (later Maximilian II). He was prolific for so short a life, producing nine Mass settings, 66 motets, and a set of Magnificats. Longer-lived composers often served several emperors – Philippe De Monte (1521-1603), for example, served for 35 years as Kapellmeister to the Austrian Habsburg court. Present at the wedding of Philip II to Mary Tudor, he met William Byrd, who became a penfriend. The successor to Vaet at Maximilian II's court, he produced 34 madrigal books (turning to motets from 1568 onwards) and 38 Mass settings.

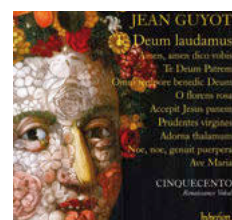
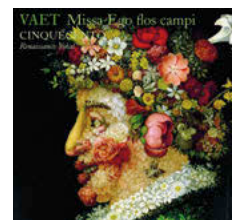
Jacob Regnart (c.1540-99) was one of five brothers, all church musicians. He was in Habsburg service from 1557-99, working for Maximilian II, Rudolf

II and Archduke Ferdinand. He dedicated three books of Mass settings to Rudolf II. Similarly, Philip Schoendorff (1565/70-c.1617) from Liège served three emperors: Maximilian II, Rudolf II and Matthias. He composed a Mass based on De Monte's motet *Usquequo Domine*. An all-round musician – singer, instrumentalist, composer, teacher – he typifies the high renaissance artist. Also from Liège, Jean Guyot (?1520-88) was a priest, composer, author, and teacher, producing 26 motets, a Mass, a Te Deum, and six chansons. He moved to Vienna in 1563, but after Ferdinand I's death, Maximilian II disbanded his chapel and established his own, so it was back to Liège for Guyot. Johannes De Cleve (1528/9-82) was appointed as tenor to chapel of Ferdinand I in Vienna and used as a headhunter for chapel singers. In 1564 he held a position in the chapel of Ferdinand I's son, Archduke Karl. He composed 'state motets', including epitaphs for Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, and works dedicated to Rudolf II and Archduke Karl. A Mass setting based on a Vaet motet illustrates the cross-fertilisation of musical inspiration.

If you haven't yet discovered Cinquecento's fascinating recordings, you've a feast in store as well as much more to look forward to. Their De Cleve CD is just out and will be followed by a recording of works by Heinrich Isaac, one of the greatest, musical figures of the late 15th/early 16th century, who worked for the Habsburg emperor Maximilian I (father of Charles V). As Tim Scott Whiteley says, 'We will certainly run out of Arcimboldo paintings for the CD covers before we do composers and repertoire.' ■

Rebecca Tavener is a singer and director specialising in early and contemporary music. She is founder-director of Canty, Scotland's only professional medieval music group.

▼ Cinquecento's Habsburg CDs are released by Hyperion Records: hyperion-records.co.uk. See also Readers' Offers on p.26



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★★★★★

'Colourful effect' (see review, p.71)



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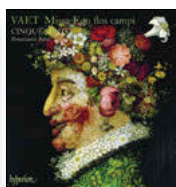
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Cinquecento

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For nearly 400 years the monarch of the Habsburg dynasty was also ruler of the Holy Roman Empire. Wealth and power resulted in new music for the court, much of which is only coming to public notice today thanks to the research and recordings of the European male vocal ensemble Cinquecento (see feature, p.23).

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▲ The organ at Pasłęk, the largest surviving instrument by Andreas Hildebrandt

Master of Gdańsk

Krzysztof Urbaniak continues his survey of historic organ building in Poland with a visit to the restored organ at Pasłęk, the most important surviving instrument by Andreas Hildebrandt. PHOTOS BY KRZYSZTOF URBANIAK

Andreas Hildebrandt (c.1681-1762) appeared as a professional organ builder in Gdańsk around 1710 and was, for a short time, active in the same territory as Daniel Nitrowski (1656-1714), the last renowned representative of a family that had dominated the Gdańsk organ landscape since 1650. There are indications that Hildebrandt belonged to the circle of Arp Schnitger, although no proof has yet

emerged. Similarities in the layout of organ cases and inner construction between the early organs of Andreas Hildebrandt and the late organs of Schnitger are striking. In 1713-14, Hildebrandt completed the major refurbishment of the Paul Lüdemann organ at St Mary's in Koszalin (today in northern Poland), an instrument begun by the famous Schnitger pupil Johann Balthasar Held. Hildebrandt's critical remarks regarding the

work carried out by Held before the latter's death may suggest that there was no master-pupil succession, however. A possible explanation is a connection with Schnitger's 'disliked' pupil Johann Michael Röder, who forged a brilliant career in Silesia from the mid-1720s onwards. Both Hildebrandt and Röder built transposing devices for their organs; both were huge fans of moving figures on their organ cases; both made

►

◁ complicated mechanisms with bells and stars; and both equipped their organs with many string stops, and reeds in the north German style. Despite Hildebrandt being a member of the reformed St Elisabeth church in Gdańsk, where he regularly met Daniel Nitrowski's second wife Florentina Unslat, commissions for new organs came from all denominations: Catholics, Lutherans and the Reformed Church.

not survive the post-war communist era, its pipes used to complete several damaged instruments in and around Gdańsk. Despite the fact that the Polish inventory of historic organs is not yet complete, it is known that at least six partly preserved organs from Hildebrandt's workshop still exist. All are characterised by the very high quality of their workmanship, refined tonal concepts and highly representative façades. The

Hildebrandt's instruments enjoyed a very good reputation and survived for many years, thanks to their high quality and his use of the best available materials

Between 1710 and 1762, Hildebrandt worked on more than 50 organs. His instruments enjoyed a very good reputation and survived for many years, thanks to their high quality and his use of the best available materials. The last surviving Hildebrandt organ in Gdańsk (St Barbara's church) – one of the master's largest creations – was kept safe in 1943 but, unfortunately, did

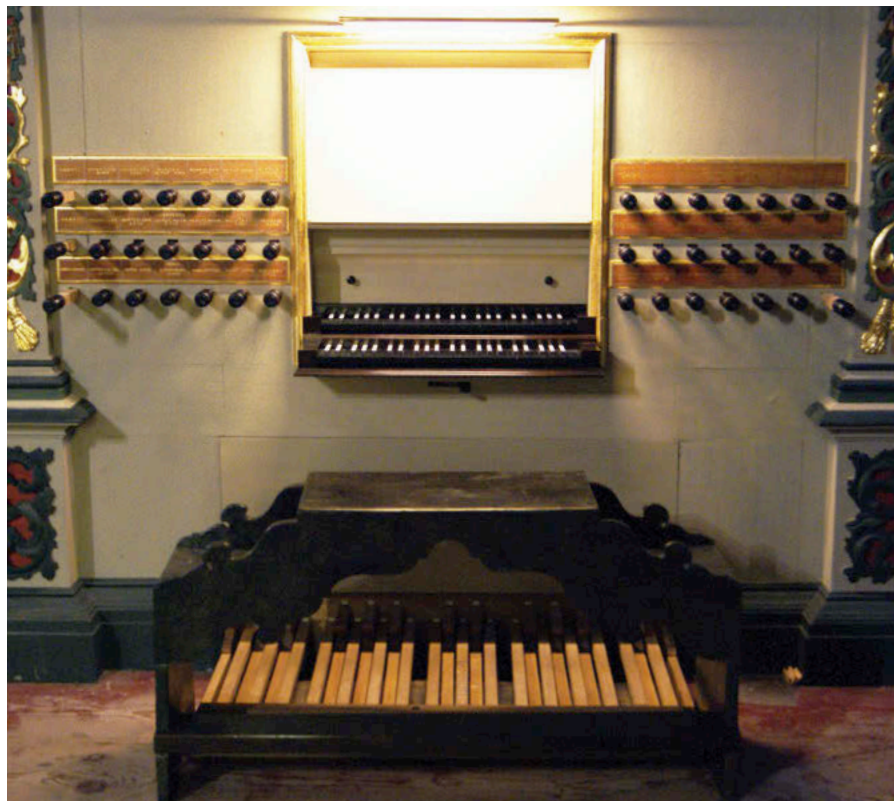
largest of these is the organ of Pasłęk, built in 1717-19 and restored – retaining its original specification after extensive research work – in 2010-13 by Kristian Wegscheider of Dresden under the supervision of the Baltisches Orgel Centrum e.V. Stralsund. The Pasłęk organ still contains original wind-chests (four of five), original pipes in 25 of its 36 stops (including the façade

pipes, saved from the 1917 requisition) and one of Europe's best-preserved baroque winding systems. It is an interesting, almost symbolic, coincidence, that the year 2019 marked both the 300th anniversary of Arp Schnitger's death and the 300th birthday of Hildebrandt's organ in Pasłęk.

From his earliest instruments, Hildebrandt deployed full chromatic bass octaves and four-octave manual compasses as standard. Pedal divisions were always highly independent, even in single-manual organs, their compasses reaching to d¹, or occasionally even to f¹. Hildebrandt was the first organ builder in Gdańsk to equip the manual divisions of his organs with the stops Vox humana 8, Viol di Gamba 8 and Fagot 16, as well as tierce mixtures. His pedal divisions were often provided with a Quintbass 10^{2/3}, a complete set of 16, 8 and 4ft reeds and – especially in his later creations – a ubiquitous 8ft string stop. Hildebrandt developed a characteristic style of organ façade, dubbed the 'Danziger Prospekt' by Jan Janca. This features two 8ft and 16ft pedal towers and is laid out in a single horizontal line parallel with the balustrade of the organ balcony. Hildebrandt was also an advocate of the well-tempered tuning system, as documented in his 1727 statement about the main organ at St Mary's in Gdańsk; an instrument built by Georg and Andreas Nitrowski in collaboration with Johann Balthasar Held in 1672-75. In 1727, the organ still had its original meantone temperament. Hildebrandt suggested, among other things, that it be retuned to 'the newest and most useful temperament' in which one can play 'all music, especially in the more romantic keys.'

Probably one of Hildebrandt's most extravagant organs, and his first commission of substantial size, was the organ at Pasłęk, some 85km east of Gdańsk. The concept of a completely independent pedal division reaches its peak here – not in the form of pedal towers, but rather a complete second organ case mirroring that of the Hauptwerk; a real 'Pedal Organ'. Both cases were placed at an angle of some 40 degrees. The south case contains the console with its two manuals, pedalboard and 42 stopknobs, as well as the two wind-chests of the 13-stop Hauptwerk and wind-chest of the 11-stop Oberwerk. The north organ case contains

▼ The console is located at the base of the south case



the two pedal wind-chests, each with a Sperrventil (cut-out valve).

The Oberwerk is a division filled with solo and colour potential. Of particular interest is the chorus of wooden 8, 4 and 2ft flutes. The Flöte douce 8 is a soft Gedackt, the Fleute douce 4 a very soft conical stop and the Traverse 2 an exotic stopped *and* overblowing flute of quint length. They can be used individually, in different combinations or all together, the 8ft and 2ft combination giving a particularly pleasant and sparkling effect. These three stops also work very well in basso continuo (the Oberwerk has a transposing device allowing it to be played at $a^1 = 465$ Hz or 415 Hz).

The basis for the Oberwerk plenum would normally be the Kurtz Flöte 8ft – a chimney flute with chimneys inside the pipe body (like the Kortfleut found in many Swedish organs of the 18th century). The chorus continues via the elegant Principal 4 and Octaf 2, to the Sesquialter. The Oberwerk plenum might also absorb the fiery conical Nasat $2^{2/3}$ and perhaps even the Schalmose 8, whose sound hovers somewhere between a Dulcian and baroque oboe. The rather strong-sounding, inverted conical Salicional 4, the only string stop on the Oberwerk, works well with the flutes. However, it also reinforces the Principal 4 nicely and can even be used instead of the Principal in the plenum or in combinations of a more pronounced solo character such as Kurtz Flöte 8 + Salicional 4 + Sesquialter. Prior to the advent of Andreas Hildebrandt in Gdąnsk, the Nitrowski and Brandtner family circles would sometimes deploy a Salicional 4 instead of an Octava 4, reinforcing Mattheson's statement that a Salicional is really a mild Principal. Finally, the Vox humana 8 works well with the flutes and tremulant (to the entire organ) as a solo stop, but is also capable of functioning like a regal in polyphonic textures when drawn with certain other stops such as the Principal 4 and Nasat $2^{2/3}$. The combination Schalmose 8 + Vox humana 8 + Salicional 4 or Principal 4 + Sesquialter creates an interesting Zink-like sound.

The pedal division of the Hildebrandt organ is housed in its own case, an exact copy of that for the manuals. There are actually two pedal divisions, one placed on the lower chest and operated via the

St Bartholomew's, Paślęk

ANDREAS HILDEBRANDT (1717-19); REST. KRISTIAN WEGSCHEIDER (2010-13)

MANUAL [HAUPTWERK]

(C – c3)	
Quintatön	16
Principal	8
Quintatön	8
Gedackt Flöte	8
Hol Flöte 8	
Viol di Gamba	8
Octaf	4
Rohr Flöte	4
Quinta	$2^{2/3}$
Octaf	2
Tertie	$[1^{3/5}]$
Mixtur	4fach $[1^{1/3}]$
Trompet	8

OBERWERCK

(B1 – c3)	
Kurtz Flöte	8
Flöte douce Gd.	8
Principal	4
Fleute douce	4
Salicional	4
Nasat	$2^{2/3}$
Octaf	2
Traverse	2
Sesquialter	2fach $[2^{2/3}]$
Schalmose	8

Vox humana 8
Transposing device: 465 Hz – 415 Hz

PEDAL

(C – d1)	
Unter Bas Off.	16
Unter Bas Ged.	16
Quinta	$10^{2/3}$
Principal	8
Ho[l]flöte	8
Octav	4
Octaf	2
Nacht Horn	2
Rausch Quinta	2fach $[1^{1/3}]$
Fagot	16
Trompeten Bas	8
Schalmey	4

Unter Ventil
Ober Ventil

Tremulant and Ventil on both manuals
Glocken

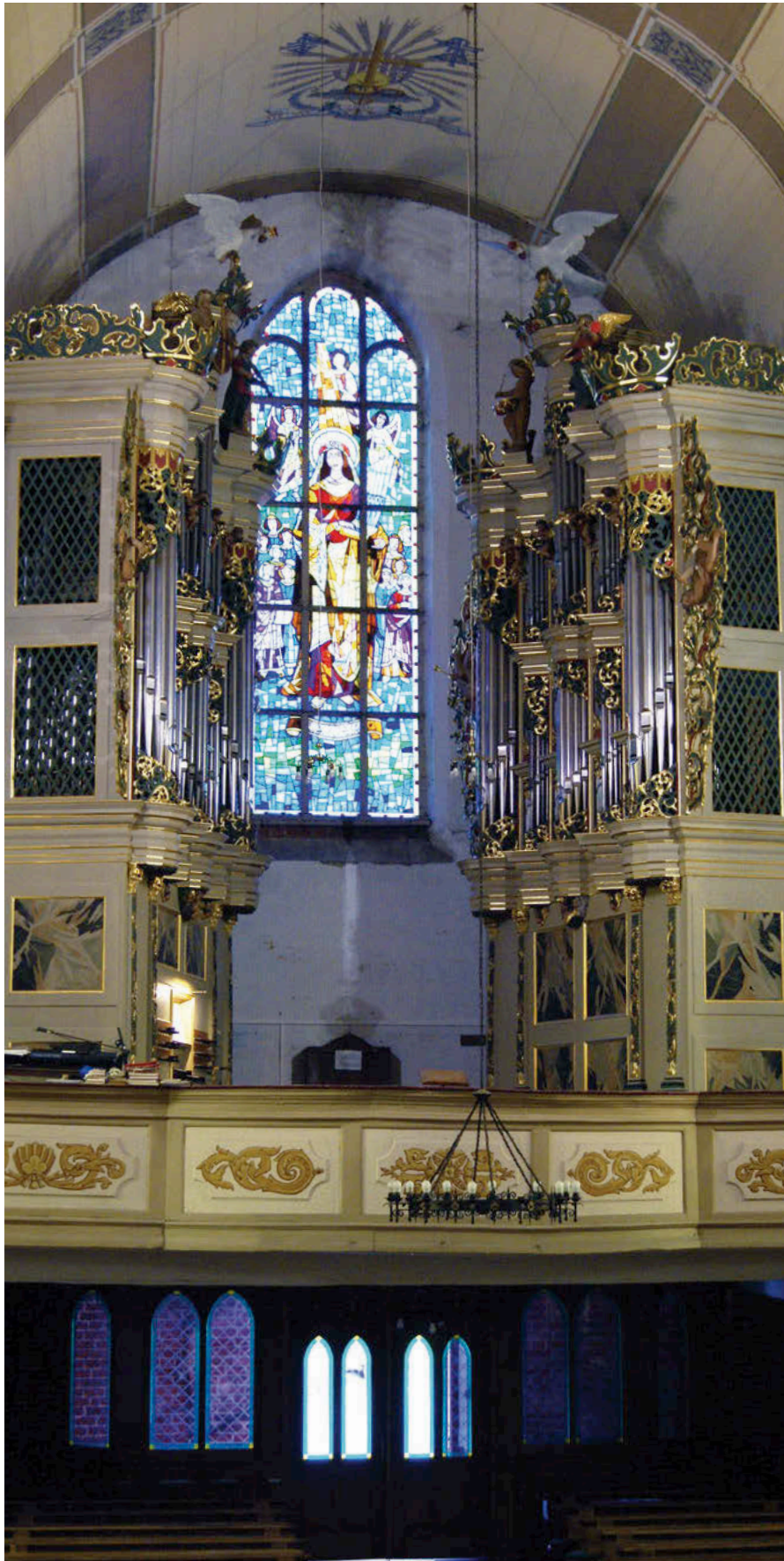
Wind pressure: 64mm
Temperament: Neidhardt 1724 (for a large city)
Pitch: A = 465Hz

'Unter Ventil', the remainder standing on its own upper chest with its own 'Ober Ventil'. There are five stops on the upper chest: the wooden, stopped Unterbas Ged. 16 with two mouths (Hildebrandt always made his Subbass 16 with a pair of mouths), a stopped metal Quinta $10^{2/3}$ standing partly *en façade*, a Principal 8 made of metal and standing completely *en façade*, an Octav 4 and Rausch Quinta II ($1^{1/3}+1$ without breaks). When combined with the Octaf 2 of the lower chest, this latter stop creates a full three-rank pedal mixture. On the lower chest is located the soft-sounding open, wooden Unterbas Offen 16 with very high cut-ups, and a wooden Hoflöte 8 (which should probably be named 'Holflöte' as on the Hauptwerk): a chimney flute with very long, wide chimneys. Finally, there is the Nacht Horn 2 (also a chimney flute). This is almost too soft to be used for cantus firmus lines in the soprano, but can be used very successfully in combinations such as 16+8+2, adding definition to the pedals, for instance in trio textures. The three reeds create an interesting ensemble here, being the only playable, partly preserved examples

from the Gdańsk school of the early 18th century. The Fagot 16 with its wooden resonators can be used entirely alone to play the lowest voice in choral fantasias. The Trompeten Bas 8 with resonators made of Weissblech (iron plate covered with tin foil) has a more rounded, fundamental sound, while the Schalmey 4 (sharing its construction with the Trompeten Bas but in a very narrow scale) can 'sing' the alto line. The Schalmey can be used in the combination often suggested in the choral variations by Daniel Magnus Gronau (1700-47) for the cantus firmus in the

▼ The organ's preserved original stop labels





◁ bass (flues 16+8+Schalmey 4) but it also blends well with the Trompeten Bas 8 for the pedal part of fugues played using the reed combinations of the Oberwerk. When combined with the Octaf 2 and, perhaps, the Unter Bas Offen 16, these reeds create an underpinning capable of supporting the full plenum of the Oberwerk. The cut-out valves of the pedal division can be used to facilitate quick changes of registration (as demanded for instance by the Gdańsk composer Theophilus Andreas Volckmar in his organ sonatas). One can have Fagot 16 + Trompeten Bas 8 + Schalmey 4 + Octaf 2 on the lower chest and the full plenum on the upper chest, and alternate between them without being forced to pull many stops at one time. For quick changes from *forte* to *piano*, one can take the same big combination of Unter Bas Ged. 16 + Principal 8 + Octaf 4 + Rausch Quinta II + Fagot 16 + Trompeten Bas 8 + Schalmey 4 + Octaf 2 and reduce to *piano* simply by cancelling the Unter Ventil and Rausch Quinta.

The Hauptwerk, with its five 8ft stops, already represents the completely developed scheme Hildebrandt used as standard in most of his later organs. The chorus is based on a full-bodied Quintatön 16, supporting the plenum but also great for quick bass lines in combination with one or two other stops. The Principal 8 *en façade* is of the same scale as the Octaf 4, Quinta $2^{2/3}$, Octaf 2 and Mixtur IV, together forming a well-balanced plenum. The Tertia $1^{3/5}$ is of a wider scale, as if made from 'shortened pipes of the Octaf 2' – the concept used by Gottfried Silbermann for such stops. It can be used both in solo combinations, to create a Sesquialtera-like sound, or drawn together with the mixture in the plenum. The Gedackt Flöte 8 is a wooden stop, slightly broader than the Flöte douce 8 of the Oberwerk. Together with the strong Quintatön 8 and Rohr Flöte 4, this stop creates a mild Nasat-like effect. More opulent than the Gedackt Flöte 8 is the wide, metal Hol Flöte 8 – a chimney flute of the same scale as the Rohr Flöte 4 and the pedal Nach Horn 2. The slightly peppery

◀ The organ's pair of cases, with the manual divisions on the south side of the gallery and the pedal division on the north side

effect of the chimney flutes in Pasłek renders even combinations such as Quintatön 16 + Rohr Flöte 4 quite successful. The Viol di Gamba 8 is of a wider scale than the Oberwerk's Salicional 4 but of almost the same construction. It creates beautiful ensembles with the other 8ft and 4ft stops of the Hauptwerk. The Trompet 8 is of a similar scale to the pedal Trompeten Bas 8, likewise with resonators made of Weissblech. It blends well with all the other stops of the Hauptwerk. Particularly beautiful is the combination Quintatön 16 + Trompet 8 + Octaf 4, to which can be added the mutations, 2ft stops and finally the mixture, perhaps further strengthened by the Principal 8 and Quintatön 8, to create a bright tutti.

There is also a toy stop, the Glockenstern, consisting of two stars and eight angel figures with moving arms playing the brass bells. The mechanism is fed with wind from additional key channels in the wind-chests of the Hauptwerk and the upper pedal. The Glockensterns can be used together or each side individually (one can use the Ventil of the Hauptwerk and Ober Ventil of the pedals to switch between them). I believe they are best used in smaller combinations, as the mechanism takes a lot of wind and compromises the plenum sound.

The Pasłek organ has proved very important in the field of organ education and organ reconstruction in Poland. Its pipes, bellows and wind-chests have been used as models for new organs in historic styles: the Wegscheider organ at Gdańsk's Holy Trinity church (completed in 2018), the Grönlund organ at the Music Academy in Łódź (completed in 2019) and the Schumacher organ at St John's in Gdańsk (completed in 2020). There are summer organ academies, organ competitions and numerous recordings made in Pasłek, hopefully to the satisfaction of Andreas Hildebrandt as he looks down on us from above. ■

Dr Krzysztof Urbaniak is professor of organ and head of the Institute of Harpsichord, Organ, Sacred Music and Early Instruments at the Bacewicz Academy of Music in Łódź, as well as a multi-award-winning organist. From 2013-16 he was an organ expert for the Polish Ministry of Culture.



Freestyle BY GRAEME KAY

The weirdest Easter ever; and unlocking the lockdown

I don't feel entirely comfortable proposing that, in an imagined head-to-head between the addresses of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope on the weirdest Easter Sunday ever, in my view the Pope won hands down. The two church leaders would not of course recognise that they were in any kind of competition, but nonetheless in terms of content and context, I think the See of Rome had it.

Content first: Justin Welby cited Coventry Cathedral, only the second cathedral in this country to be completed since St Paul's, as an example of something fired by imagination, hope, inspiration and ambition. In the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic, the resurrection of Christ was an eternal symbol of hope; NHS workers were credited and the Archbishop looked to a future in which a chastened population emerged into a better world. Understandably, he steered clear of the overtly political – leaders of the established church in the UK have grown used to puce-faced, knee-jerk calls, mostly from the right wing, for them to 'stay out of politics'. The Pope felt no such constraints: he tore into those who risked destroying the postwar consensus and European institutions which had kept the continent in peace; he appealed for the most vulnerable in society not to be abandoned; for the existential threat of the pandemic to bring an end to bitter conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine; to relieve the suffering of refugees in the Mediterranean; and to bring relief to other incipient humanitarian crises in Mozambique and Venezuela. Pope Francis certainly landed his punches.

Then there was the context: the vast spaces of St Peter's Basilica permitted physical distancing in the extreme in a magnificent church containing only a choir, camera operators and the Pope's ever-present Master of Pontifical Liturgical Ceremonies, Monsignor Guido Marini. The Archbishop of Canterbury was in his kitchen at Lambeth Palace.

This was a consequence of the Church of England's decision to close its churches and ban clergy from entering them, even to stream services or conduct funerals – this has caused unimaginable anguish to those bereaved by Covid-19, often after being effectively banned from contact with dying relatives. As I write, churches in Germany are open again, with no singing allowed; CofE clergy – but not congregations – are now allowed back. Perhaps the lockdown will be further relaxed; while no one would gainsay the need to protect vulnerable, elderly congregants, there seems little logic in having supermarkets open to the public and not churches – after all, church aisles are usually less crowded than those in Aldi and Waitrose. Singing is another matter – there have been horrendous stories of choirs in America which carried on rehearsing as the pandemic took hold, even with physical distancing, only for the virus to rip through the ranks and carry some members to horrible deaths before their time. Will we all be functioning again in time to sing Nine Lessons and Carols in 2020?

Paradoxically, Church of England guidance to organists seemed fractionally less stern than that extended to priests. Organ practice was deemed non-essential and not to be undertaken in church. However, latterly recognising that organs do not thrive on neglect in unheated churches, organists in charge of large and complex instruments were subsequently allowed to enter buildings and put their organs through their paces in order to keep them functioning. Spare a thought also for all the furloughed organ tuners, denied access to the instruments in their care. In its handling of all this, the Church of England may have covered itself, but in my view not in glory. ■

Graeme Kay is a digital platforms producer for BBC Radio 3 and 4.



Anna Semple

Nunc dimittis

Anna Semple talks to **Shirley Ratcliffe** about her aleatoric canticle setting for SATB and solo violin, and the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic



COURTESY ANNA SEMPLE

▲ Anna Semple: 'As a freelance singer, I've become more aware of balance, blend and logistics'

Anna Semple is a freelance alto, although initially she began lessons unwillingly. 'I had to have singing lessons in the sixth form as part of my music scholarship,' she says, 'but I started them begrudgingly, as I found it really embarrassing. Although I loved singing in choirs, I didn't think much of my ability, so it wasn't until university that I really found my feet and gained confidence.'

Semple read music at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and was a choral scholar of its Chapel Choir, graduating in 2018. 'My time in the Chapel Choir ignited the choral spark in me and introduced me to the discipline of singing in a liturgical context, as well as offering a fantastic foundation in choral skills in a supportive and friendly environment.'

In my third year I sang with Jesus College, which offered a different enlightening experience. I'm grateful to my directors for being so supportive. In my third year I successfully auditioned for Genesis Sixteen, a training partnership with The Sixteen, and this experience inspired me to want to continue with my singing professionally.'

The encouragement Semple had received from her music teachers at school sparked an interest in composing: 'They helped me to broaden my listening at a critical time in my musical development, which led me to want to create similar sounds myself'. At university she was taught composition by Ewan Campbell: 'He pushed me beyond my usual comfort zones, and was invaluable in giving me advice on how to continue composing

after graduating. During my degree much of what I studied challenged me to approach music in new ways, which shaped how I think about music generally.'

Semple's varied experiences of singing in choirs has given her composing a special insight: 'As a freelancer you have to be a fluent sightreader and a versatile musician, as you often don't have long to rehearse before a concert or service. As a result, I think I've become more aware of issues of balance, blend and logistics associated with writing for choirs.' She is inspired by visual stimuli – 'bold architecture or colours' – and also finds a lot of starting points in literature. 'Words are able to capture so much precisely. It can often be one line of a play or poem that can spiral into something musical. I love writing for voices, so text plays a large role, though it can be in the way the words sound when they are spoken as much as their semantic meaning. I am aware of how wonderfully unique every voice is. I'm really excited to explore this in my writing by using a more open notation lending itself to individual freedom. Often there's not enough time to wait for "inspiration", so I like to think of these things as stimuli for the imagination.'

For her *C&O* commission for Graham Ross and the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, Semple was given a fairly open brief: 'I decided to go for a setting of the Nunc dimittis, as I'd been meaning to have a go at the canticles for a while. I then realised that this was actually quite a daunting challenge. There are so many settings of it that are dearly loved by singers everywhere, so I wanted to make sure there was still life to be breathed into the words. Graham also offered the chance to write for an instrument with the choir, so I leapt at the opportunity and chose the violin because of its versatility.'

The Clare choir has a formidable reputation, so I wanted to write something that would allow each singer to have autonomy and play an active part in the creation of material – hopefully that’s what will come across in performance.

‘I want the words of the Nunc to be a more personal petition than they are often seen as. I think it is easy to view them as a formula or ritual, rather than the words of a human being. I want to bring to my setting the idea of an individual reaching out, within the context of choral singing. I’ve used a few aleatoric techniques, which allow individual members of the choir to make individual decisions based on parameters (i.e. pitches or dynamics I’ve chosen) that are set. I love the idea that music exists in performance. I’m excited to see what happens to my piece as each performance could be quite different – that unpredictability is really exciting!’

which includes Unsuk Chin, Kaija Saariaho, Hans Abrahamsen, The Beatles, The Velvet Underground and Cécile McLorin Salvant.’

During the Covid-19 disruption, Semple has engaged in a few online collaborations: ‘It’s been fun and reasonably productive, but after the novelty of having so much time to write, I’m now getting a sense of the pressure to be productive. It’s not realistic to expect too much from this strange situation; it’s more important to prioritise mental and physical health. I spend the same amount of time [each day] on work, and use the rest to read, binge-watch new television series, and do the things that remain from “normal” life. I really miss performing’ – being a freelance alto in several choirs has been helping to fund her – ‘so there are times when the last thing I want to do is focus on music. Conversely, music has also been a great way of escaping – you have to find

‘It’s easy to view the words as a formula ... I want to bring the idea of an individual reaching out’

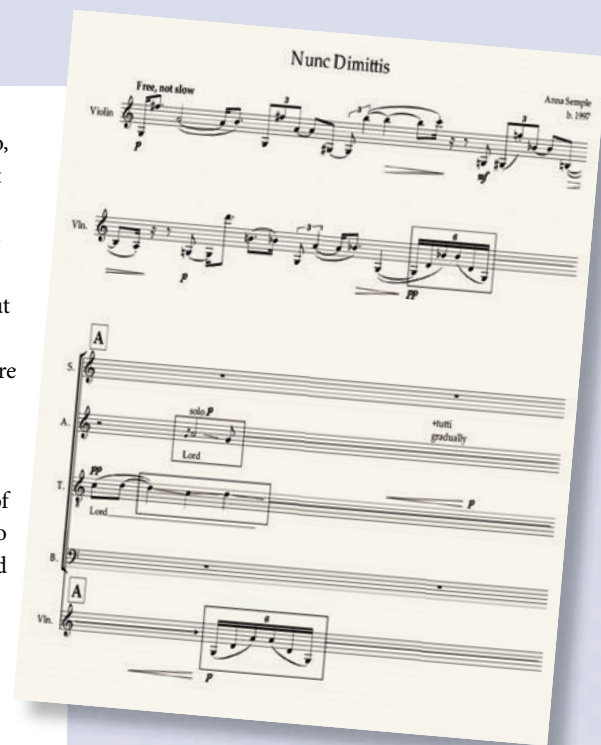
After graduation, Semple moved to the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London to study for a Master’s in Composition: ‘I felt as though I hadn’t spent enough undergraduate time really focusing on the fine point of writing music. I wanted to find my voice and continue to learn in a supportive environment. The Guildhall is incredibly open-minded in its approach to music-making and my year has been in some ways more challenging than my Bachelor’s. I’m constantly questioning my preconceived ideas about what music can be. I’ve been studying with Matthew Kaner, who has pushed me further from my comfort zone and constantly introduced me to new ideas and ways of thinking about my musical “problems”. Since starting my postgraduate course, I’ve noticed the difference it makes to be part of a small cohort (there are six of us) and the influence this has on my writing process. It’s in equal parts intimidating and encouraging to see how different our styles are, but it pushes me to think about why I write music and what I want to achieve. More generally my influences change pretty regularly, depending upon my latest listening obsession from a range of genres

what works for you.’

Since the lockdown began, Semple has had premieres cancelled, and for the summer term the Guildhall moved online, so all performances are on hold. ‘It’s going to be an added challenge to submit my portfolio without having heard the pieces. The Pimlico Foundation [where she works as a teacher-singer] and a number of choirs have been incredibly supportive in paying advances for postponed concerts, but there is absolutely no new work coming in and my diary is scarily empty. Government support for new freelancers is fairly non-existent. I just hope this passes sooner than later and I’m hoping I’ll be able to get through it.’

During this period of the Covid-19 pandemic, millions of lives are on hold and the future is uncertain. There are many young composers who share Semple’s experience of starting to make a career or being at a crossroads. Government needs to recognise quickly that the future of this country will eventually be in the hands of the young. They need all the financial help and support they can get now. ■

Listen to Anna Semple’s music on soundcloud.com/anna-semble-composer



CORONAVIRUS

In view of the coronavirus pandemic, the premiere of *Nunc dimittis* has been postponed. Details will be announced in due course.

To ensure that readers may benefit from the full six months’ free download, the score of *Nunc dimittis* will be placed online when the nationwide shutdown is over, and extensions will also be given to other scores already online. Visit choirandorgan.com and click on New Music series for updates.



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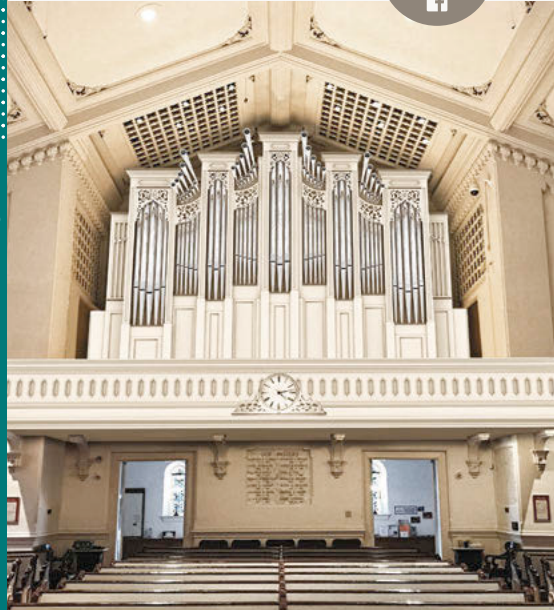


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Membership ISO, AIO

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Area National

Membership ISO

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Membership ISO, VON

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Membership FNO

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Services N, R, P, C

Area National

Membership ISO, FNO

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Services N, R, P, C • W (no appointment necessary)

Area National

Membership ISO

SWEDEN

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gronlund@gronlunds-orgelbyggeri.se

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Services N, R, P • W (by appointment)

Membership ISO, FSO

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Membership ISO, FSO

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Membership GSO, ISO, IAOD, Österreichisches Orgelforum

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Membership ISO

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Services N • W (by appointment)

Membership ISO, IBO

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Work in progress

Paul Hale steps inside the Malvern workshop of Nicholson & Co. Ltd to find a new organ for Radley College sitting alongside restorations of instruments by J.W. Walker and William Denman. WORKSHOP PHOTOS BY PAUL HALE

In at one end – out at the other. The long-established company of Nicholson & Co. Ltd followed several other firms (notably Harrison & Harrison, Peter Collins Ltd and Kenneth Tickell & Co.) in moving from rambling old buildings, pressed into inefficient use as workshops, into new purpose-built factory premises. Modern buildings offer greater efficiency all round, if carefully designed, the Nicholson plant being particularly notable in this respect.

Behind a large roller door at the front lies a spacious 'reception room' where disassembled organs and large new components arrive and are initially stored. Behind that are three workshop areas – one for action restoration and manufacture, one for the making of slider soundboards, and one for bellows work and new consoles. To one side is the timber store and mill, with a side entrance and staff kitchen on the other side. Upstairs is a capacious storage area, the electrical wiring room, the drawing office and the accountant's office. Outside the main building is a separate suite of offices and the firm's archive store. At the rear of the factory, rising to the full height of the building, is a large enough space to erect one or two organs as they are made or restored. Off to one side of this room are two voicing rooms and the pipe-making department; on the other side is another large roller door through which a completed organ, once packed up, is dispatched. In at one end – out at the other, indeed.

The current management aims to steer the company into an era where its 15 craftsmen (divided into project teams) ▶



▶ **Mike Longstaff** adjusts valves in an Open Wood chest of the 1885 William Denman organ in York

Nicholson & Co. Ltd – how it all began



▲ The firm's founder, John Nicholson, and (rt) the original workshop in Palace Yard, Worcester



John Nicholson (1815-95) came from a family of organ builders in the Rochdale area. His father's commissions included a new organ for what was then the Countess of Huntingdon's Methodist Chapel in Worcester, which was completed in 1840. Spotting an opportunity, John stayed on in Worcester, set up his own firm in 1841 and was soon extremely busy.

Early notable John Nicholson instruments were installed at the Worcester Public Hall (1844, III/56), which was acclaimed by Clutton & Niland (*The British Organ*) as the finest English organ of the day (not least because of its 12-stop Pedal organ), at Gloucester Shire Hall (1849, III/36, listed in Hopkins & Rimbault, again because of its complete Pedal organ), Great Malvern Priory (1850/1862/1880, IV/47), and Manchester Cathedral (1860, III/42; now in Portsmouth Cathedral where it was installed by Nicholson & Co. in 1994).

Nicholson's ability to build effective, musical and reliable church organs for a modest price rapidly enabled his firm to supply hundreds of churches, from the south coast of England to the north of Scotland, as well as for clients in such far-off countries as China, Australia and New Zealand. Edward Elgar's father played one in St George's Catholic Church in Worcester – the first organ the young Edward played, and where he in turn later became organist.

From 1903-16 the company was in the charge of Arthur Whinfield, a renowned photographer who brought many technical innovations to the firm's work, such as pneumatic action and his own patent stop controls. The company developed a smooth Edwardian tonal style, leading to fine instruments such as the Birmingham &

Midland Institute (rebuilt 1924), Birmingham Oratory (1909), Leominster Priory (1924) and St Francis, Bournville (1933).

Stanley Lambert took over in 1935 and ran the firm for nearly 40 years, for a time in association with J.W. Walker, with whom the company shared various skills (such as effective Haskell basses) and design ideas (such as console equipment, including a patent for double-touch cancelling on stop-knobs). Highlights of this period include the large instruments in All Saints', Cheltenham (1952), Birmingham Central Hall (1955), Bristol University (1963), and St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham (1968, since replaced). In 1956 Lambert led the move of the company from its original home in Palace Yard, Worcester to a new home in converted premises on Quest Hills Road, Malvern.

A new era dawned in 1974, when Robert Kitchener, Raymond Todd and the celebrated voicer Dennis Thurlow took over the firm. Work over the next two decades featured much neo-classical voicing, in instruments such as St Barnabas, Oxford (1976), St Mary, Warwick (1980) and Our Lady, Slough (1988); there were major rebuilds such as Newcastle Cathedral (1981), St Laurence, Ludlow (1985

and later), Birmingham Oratory (1987) and St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham (1992). In addition, many countryside church organs were restored, and several historic instruments such as the Forster & Andrews in West Bromwich Town Hall (1984) – a particular favourite of Dennis Thurlow.

From 1994-2018 the firm thrived under the tenure of Andrew Moyes, supported by Guy Russell (who had worked for many years with Dennis Thurlow) as tonal director, with many technical innovations and a gradual return to a less neo-classical, more 'English' tonal style in significant new instruments such as Southwell Minster (1995/6), Uppingham School (2007), Llandaff Cathedral (2010/13), and Holy Trinity Cathedral, Auckland, New Zealand (2016/7), Llandaff and Auckland being the largest projects in the firm's history. Significant rebuilds included those of Portsmouth Cathedral (1994), St Woolos Cathedral (1997), Christchurch Priory (1999, with subsequent additions), Great Malvern Priory (2004), Bridlington Priory (2005), Belmont Abbey (2010) and St Michael, Cornhill (also 2010). Among sensitive restorations, that of the Father Willis organ in St Peter's College, Oxford (2003), the 1861 Gray & Davison in Usk parish church (2006), the 1911 Norman & Beard in St Mary, Rye (2009), and the 1877 Hill now in St Barnabas, Ealing (2011) are notable. In 2003 the firm moved to new modern premises, planned by Andrew Moyes, just outside Malvern.

Since 2018 Nicholson & Co. has been under the leadership of Andrew Caskie, a chartered engineer and former pupil of the late David Sanger (and currently one of the organists at Malvern Priory). Caskie is a former chairman of the Scottish Federation of Organists organ advisory team and was director of music at Palmerston Place Church in Edinburgh. He is supported by head voicer James Atherton, who joined Nicholson & Co. in 2005 as a tuner and voicer working under Guy Russell, having begun his career in organ building with David Wells in Liverpool. With this leadership, the 18-strong Nicholson team seeks to maintain the ethos and character of the firm's founder and his instruments, allied to modern organ-building methods and museum-standard conservation techniques.

▼ The present workshop, just outside Malvern



◁ work on two main strands at the same time – new organs and historical restorations. Straightforward ‘rebuids’ also continue to feature, as does basic overhaul work, but the desire is quite clear – to divide the factory’s output at any one time into the two dominant strands of new and restorative work. So it is that at present the company currently has three organs going through the workshops – two historic restorations and a new organ.

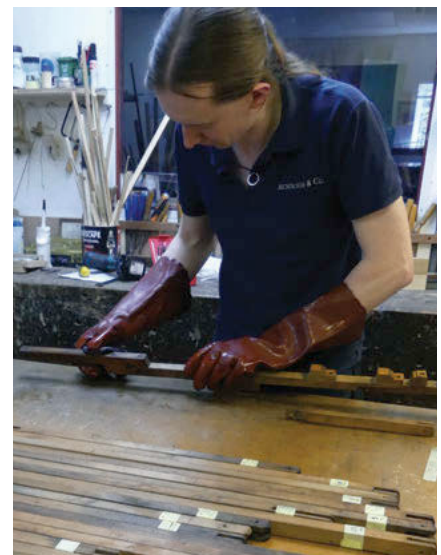
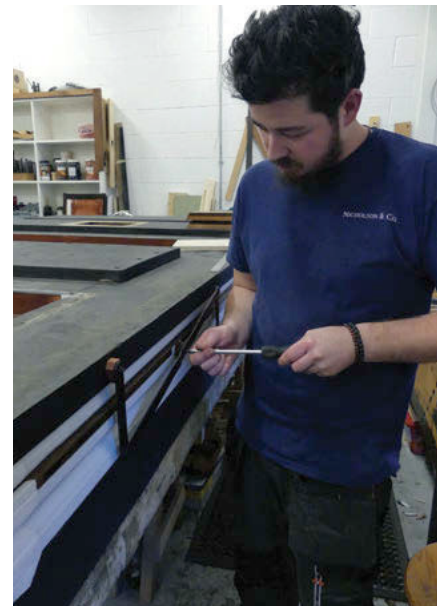
The smaller restoration is of the beautifully encased 1871 J.W. Walker organ which stands at the west end of the church

of St Michael and All Angels, Moccas, near Hereford. In January 2020 Nicholson & Co. began work on its comprehensive historical restoration, during which almost every part of the instrument is being returned to its 1871 condition. The exquisite casework decoration is to be restored by the International Fine Arts Conservation Studios (Bristol), and the ‘Bailey’s Patent’ water engine is to be restored to working condition, with a new recirculating system, by James Richardson-Jones of the Duplex Pipe Organ & Blower Co. On my visit to the workshops earlier this year, before the

lockdown, it was a pleasure to observe every tiny part of this beautiful organ being carefully restored or conserved, using appropriate materials.

Exactly the same approach is being applied to the second, larger restoration project in hand. This involves removing the instrument from St Michael-le-Belfry church, York, and installing it in St Lawrence’s church, one mile south. This organ was built in 1885 by the York organ builder William Denman and was to be one of the largest instruments of his career, housed in richly carved oak casework ▷

▼ Work on the York instrument continues: (clockwise, from top right) Darren Bingham repairs splits in casework panelling; Csaba Farkas fits counterbalances to a restored reservoir; David Roskelly works on mechanical stop action; the empty case, with front pipes in the background; assistant foreman Tim Bennett assesses an Open Wood ventil





▲ Restoring an 1871 J.W. Walker organ for a Herefordshire church: (clockwise, from top left) Luke Morton leathers hydraulic pumping feeders; head voicer James Atherton regulates the speech of a Principal 4ft; Kelvin Kent restores a combination pedal; foreman Kevin Davies at work on a double-rise reservoir; Wesley Gibbard restores the keyboards

◀ enclosing it on all sides. Tonal alterations were undertaken by John Jackson in 1975 (neo-classical replacement ranks in the fashion of the time). The organ's condition declined to the point that it became unplayable in the mid-1990s; the church recently obtained permission to rehouse it elsewhere. In December 2019, work commenced on a full historical restoration, returning the organ in every way (with the sole exception of the balanced Swell pedal) to its 1885 condition as left by Denman. The tonal modifications are being reversed by making new pipework, copied from surviving Denman examples elsewhere.

The soundboards and actions (mechanical to manuals, pneumatic to pedals) are being restored without alteration. The appearance of the case woodwork was marred by an attempt at liming the oak many years ago; the liming has been cleaned off and the oak is being restored and refinished to its original lustre. As there are large cracks, owing to shrinkage (St Michael-le-Belfry is well-heated), a lengthy task involves cutting small pieces of perfectly matched oak, glueing them into the case panels and carvings, trimming and finishing them to match. Upon completion of the restoration, the organ will be installed in the spacious

north transept of St Lawrence's, the first organ of real quality in this large church's 136-year life.

Alongside all the 19th-century components spread around the workshops are unmistakable signs of a brand new instrument being started: a new reservoir awaiting leathering and some shiny spotted metal being made up into a 4ft Octave, of generous scale. This is the beginning of a new 53-stop organ for Radley College, near Oxford, an independent boys' boarding school founded in 1847. Known for its high standard of music, the College regularly attracts as music scholars choristers

from Oxford University's Christ Church, Magdalen and New College, thus ensuring a steady supply of highly trained and fully motivated musical pupils. The entire school gathers daily in the school chapel to worship, their hearty hymn-singing being truly impressive. Recent and planned increases in the school roll have led to a major project, now under way, to extend the lofty chapel, designed by Sir Thomas Jackson in 1893, with a new east end and additional seating.

The chapel's first organ was built by Telford of Dublin in 1848 and was initially housed in the former chapel. When installed in the present building in 1895, it was located in the west gallery by Charles Martin (of Oxford) in a splendid oak case by Jackson and enlarged to five manuals, with 60 speaking stops. Pressure from rising school numbers led to the gallery being needed for seating, so this organ was replaced in 1938 with a largely new instrument by Rushworth & Dreaper which had to struggle to be heard from two specially built chambers behind side walls at either end of the chapel. This organ was in turn replaced with a new tracker-action instrument by Hill, Norman & Beard in 1979, in a chamber off the enlarged west gallery. Sadly, this proved tonally inadequate from the outset and was quickly supplemented with some of the remaining R&D material in the south-east chamber.

A new extension to the chapel, so that congregations of around 800 can

gather every day, has made the need for a replacement instrument imperative. The new Nicholson organ will, once again, be sited in the centre of the west gallery, within a new oak case conceived and drawn by Michael Lane, Nicholson's experienced designer, inspired by Thomas Jackson's work, though not a slavish copy. The organ will have three manuals and 53 stops, with mechanical action to the manuals and electro-pneumatic action to the Pedal Organ. The tonal scheme emphasises sonority along with rich choruses and many 'colour stops'; it will represent the first fully-new scheme scaled and voiced by James Atherton in his role as head voicer. The largest pedal pipework (including two 32ft ranks) will be located in the chamber where the present organ is situated, behind a new oak screen with tracery to match the adjacent windows. Installation is planned for autumn 2021.

While working on these three projects, the firm has been responding to an unprecedented number of invitations to tender. The projects confirmed for 2021 and 2022 concentrate on restoration work: principal among them is a highly significant contract of international importance – Manchester Town Hall. Nicholson & Co. have won a joint contract with Flentrop Orgelbouw of the Netherlands to reconstruct this large 1877/1893 Cavaillé-Coll organ back to its 1893 state, removing the later additions and actions.

Such interesting work as the firm has in

▼ (from top) designer Mike Lane sets out the new organ for Radley College; pipe maker Richard Sanders cuts out a new Octave 4ft

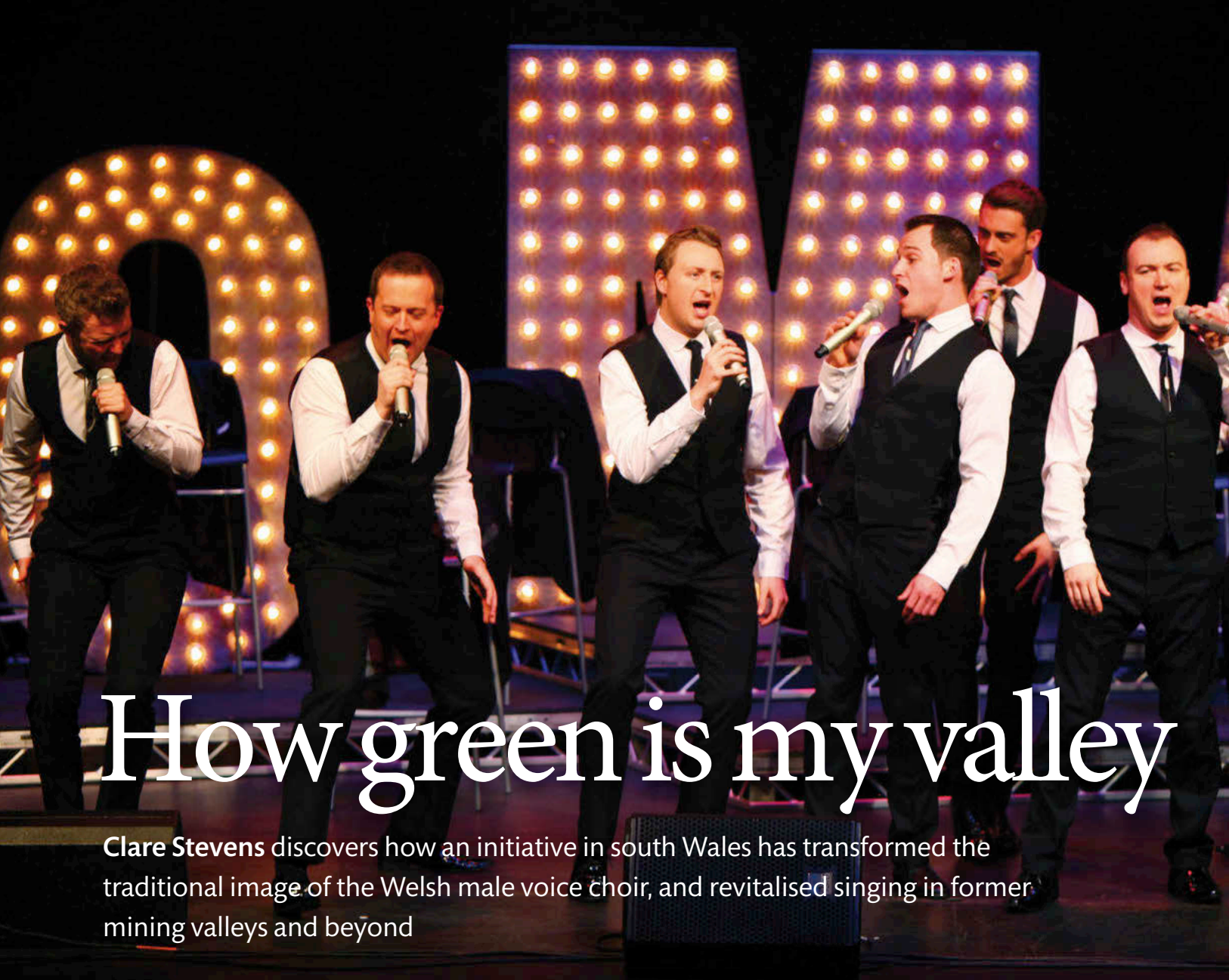


▼ Managing director Andrew Caskie in his office



hand – in addition to the two very large new organs made in recent years for Llandaff and Auckland (NZ) cathedrals – not only ensures that the company prospers, but also creates a notably cheerful and positive environment and workforce, where staff training is of foremost importance, with younger team members being trained by 'old hands' in the metal shop, voicing rooms and electrical department as well as by the general organ builders. It's a stimulating place to visit: I look forward with relish to my next spin in the delightful countryside surrounding the workshops – an area many of whose churches have resounded to the tone of Nicholson organs since John Nicholson set up shop in Worcester all those years ago. ■

Paul Hale has been writing about the organ for many years, while working as a cathedral organist, recitalist, teacher and organ consultant.



How green is my valley

Clare Stevens discovers how an initiative in south Wales has transformed the traditional image of the Welsh male voice choir, and revitalised singing in former mining valleys and beyond

▲ 'Fresh and funky': Only Men Aloud

One important piece of local knowledge stood singer and conductor Tim Rhys-Evans in good stead when he was setting up a network of boys' choirs in south Wales: people are happy to travel for half-an-hour or so up or down the steep-sided river valleys that characterise the region, but they won't readily undertake a five-minute drive over the hill to attend an event, especially not on a regular basis.

The coal mines may be gone, but community spirit is still strong in the towns and villages along the Rhondda, the Taff, the Sirhowy, the Usk and the many other rivers that rise in the Brecon Beacons and end up in Cardiff Bay. In times of tragedy when the mines brought disaster,

or triumph when the Welsh rugby team is on form, that spirit has traditionally expressed itself in song. From the fervent hymn-singing of the independent chapels grew the male voice choirs for which Wales is famous.

'So many people said, "You'll never get teenage boys to sing," but that was like a red rag to a bull – I was determined to prove them wrong'

Tim Rhys-Evans grew up with that tradition, playing the organ from the age of around ten in the Carmel Baptist Chapel in New Tredegar, and starting his first choir when he was 14. He went on to

the (now Royal) Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD), but focused on vocal studies rather than conducting, and was a freelance opera singer until he was unexpectedly invited to step in at short notice to conduct a choir on a tour of

America. The experience prompted him to seek out other conducting opportunities, including vocal coaching and choir training with young singers; he also found himself reflecting on Welsh male voice



COURTESY ONLY MEN ALOUD

sang a broader repertoire than that of traditional male voice choirs, and presented it in a more contemporary way, wearing city suits instead of blazers, and adding choreography to some numbers. Participating in BBC television's Last Choir Standing competition in 2008 gave them the opportunity to add a bit more glitz to their performances and prove to a huge audience that, in the words of their mission statement at the time, 'there should be no barriers placed on choral singing, and choirs can be fresh and funky.'

It was a winning formula, and Only Men Aloud was indeed the Last Choir Standing, with a finals programme that included 'Guide me, O thou Great Jehovah' sung in English and Welsh to a heavily orchestrated arrangement of the famous 'Cwm Rhondda' tune. A record deal with Universal, many more television appearances, and national and overseas tours followed; when the Ryder Cup golf tournament came to Wales, they sang to 37,000 people in the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff.

But Rhys-Evans had an urge to go much further and get younger men and boys singing. He wanted to reinvigorate the choral tradition by involving larger numbers, but he also saw the potential to provide a safe and rewarding activity for boys in economically deprived areas of the country, particularly the south Wales valleys, where crime and drug-taking were

rife and the incidence of suicide among teenage boys frighteningly high.

The success of Only Men Aloud gave him the impetus he needed both to attract members for his choirs and to source sponsorship. 'I took this idea of hundreds of boys singing to the Principality Building Society, admitting that I hadn't yet recruited a single boy but I did have this choir of young, energetic, very accomplished singers, some of whom would be effective conductors of regional choirs. Amazingly, they agreed to underwrite our activities and they are still the principal business sponsor of Only Boys Aloud.'

It was at this point that the local knowledge was brought into play, as Rhys-Evans realised how many choirs would be needed to cover such a geographically complex area. His primary aim was that they should be accessible, with no charge for membership and no audition. They would rehearse in rugby clubs rather than school or church halls, their conductors would be called team captains and they would sing a wide variety of repertoire, including specially arranged pop songs and a lot of music theatre but also some classical repertoire. 'So many people said, "You'll never get teenage boys to sing," but that was like a red rag to a bull – I was determined to prove them wrong. I knew through previous experience that with mixed choirs you get seven or

▷

choirs and on what a privilege it had been for him as a child and as a teenager to hear so many visiting choirs performing at Carmel, often with distinguished guest soloists such as Stuart Burrows, Gwyneth Jones and Margaret Price. 'I realised what an impact it had had on me, and that in some ways that sound had never left me,' he recalls; 'I started to think about how I could create something similar, but do it in a different way – breathe new life into the Welsh male voice tradition, if you like.'

The result was Only Men Aloud, formed in 2000 with 15 members, most of whom were in their twenties and thirties, including a gardener, a pharmacist and several teachers as well as professionally trained singers. They

▼ Singing offers teenage boys a safe and rewarding activity in economically depressed areas like the Rhondda valley



SHUTTERSTOCK

ONLY MEN ALOUD

COURTESY THE ALOUD CHARTY



◀ eight girls for every boy if you're lucky, and there is still huge pressure on boys not to sing, because it is seen as not masculine. But they do want to do it, they just don't necessarily want to sing the old warhorses of the traditional male voice choir repertoire, and they also want to be together as lads and have fun.'

A mixture of newspaper advertising and social media promotion ensured a successful launch in March 2010, and later that year 144 boys joined Only Men Aloud at the opening concert of the National Eisteddfod in Ebbw Vale for their first public performance. By 2012 another TV competition beckoned; Only Boys Aloud clearly stunned the judges in the audition round of *Britain's Got Talent* with their intensely moving and committed performance of the Welsh rugby anthem 'Calon Lân', presented with two soloists alone on stage for the first verse before being joined by the rest of the choir. A semi-final performance of an old gospel song sung in Welsh, 'Gwahoddiaid', took them to the final, in which they won third place and an international profile that is still paying dividends; the YouTube clip of them singing 'Calon Lân' again in the final has received 1.7 million hits. In their white shirts, ties and jeans they looked completely different from the blazer-clad gentlemen of traditional male voice choirs, but the connection to their heritage was there in the repertoire and in the passionate commitment of their singing, which touched viewers' hearts even though most couldn't understand the Welsh texts.

Rhys-Evans admits that he has been accused by colleagues in the professional music world of 'selling his soul to the devil' by going down this route, but it gave the boys who took part an experience they will never forget and has provided a calling card that has opened many other doors, including the chance to represent Wales at the 2017 centenary commemorations of the battle of Ypres. Singing at the

JAKE MORLEY



JAKE MORLEY



◀ (from top) Making singing cool: founding musical director Tim Rhys-Evans inspires the singers of Only Boys Aloud, who came third in the *Britain's Got Talent* competition; the annual residential course, Academi, offers intensive training in all aspects of musicianship, singing and performance; Only Kids Aloud is a national choir for girls and boys aged 9-11

Menin Gate and in some of the military cemeteries, surrounded by the gravestones of so many young men the same age as themselves, was another life-changing experience.

Only Boys Aloud is now administered by a registered charity, The Aloud Charity, set up in 2012; its chief executive, Rachel Dominy, has previously worked at Glyndebourne, Mid Wales Opera and Music Theatre Wales. At the beginning of 2020 Tim Rhys-Evans was appointed as head of music at the RWCMD, and stepped down from an organisational role with the choirs, though he has been designated as patron and will still conduct from time to time. The search for his successor has been interrupted by the coronavirus crisis, but Craig Yates, a founder member of Only Men Aloud, was appointed acting music director until the end of this calendar year.

There are currently 14 Only Boys Aloud choirs, based in towns and villages from Crosshands, Merthyr and Cwmbran in the south to Holyhead, Carnarfon and Rhyl in north Wales. Planned expansion to the west and central area has also been affected by the pandemic, but the ambition is to cover the country. Boys aged 11-19 can join at any time by simply coming along to a rehearsal; Yates admits that it is a challenge for the conductors to manage the sessions in such a way that newcomers are not overwhelmed while experienced singers are not bored, but it seems to work.

Those aged 16-plus who are really

serious about singing can audition for the annual residential course, Academi, where they receive intensive training in all aspects of musicianship, singing and performance, and can sing more challenging repertoire. In 2017 the Academi course members premiered a work with words by Welsh poets Owen Sheers and Dylan Thomas set to music by Mark-Anthony Turnage, a composer whose unashamedly working-class roots and personal style combined with fierce musical and intellectual ambition made him the perfect role model.

There is a charge for Academi, but bursaries are available; a key factor is that the boys are only eligible for the course if they have attended 80 percent of the year's rehearsals with their local choir.

The Aloud Charity also runs Only Kids Aloud, a national children's choir for girls and boys aged 9-11.

Only Men Aloud, meanwhile, has morphed into a fully professional octet, operating completely separately from the charity; but it recently recruited its first Only Boys Aloud graduate as a member.

A tenth birthday concert for Only Boys Aloud in St David's Hall, Cardiff, planned for October 2020, seems likely to be postponed. At the time of writing, all Only Boys Aloud's rehearsals and teaching are digital, and like so many choirs they have just recorded and broadcast on social media their first socially isolated performance (of 'Calon Lân', of course). 'Fortunately, we already had a lot of digital

resources available to support this,' says Yates, 'and the boys have adapted to this way of working really well – but of course they miss seeing each other in real life. The social element is a hugely important part of our choirs.'

Both Rhys-Evans and Yates admit to having been bullied at school because they liked music and didn't fit in with the sporty, laddish culture. But you only have to watch some of Only Boys Aloud's promotional videos, watch them singing 'You will be found' from the musical *Dear Evan Hansen* or read the impact report published on their website to see that the choirs are helping to ensure that today's generation of boys don't have to go through that experience. They have provided a haven and a safe space where everyone is accepted as an individual and can express their personality, and enabled deep friendships to flourish between boys who say they would otherwise never have met one another.

And they have made singing cool. Far from keeping it quiet that he sang in a choir, I'm told there was one young man who used to leave his music bag and his choir hoodie prominently in his car so that girls would notice that he was in Only Boys Aloud. That seems like a result to me. ■ aloud.cymru; onlymenaloud.com

Clare Stevens works as a writer, editor and publicist in the Welsh Marches, where she sings with Hereford Choral Society.

▼ Only Men Aloud has morphed into a professional octet, with Craig Yates (second left) also currently acting musical director of Only Boys Aloud



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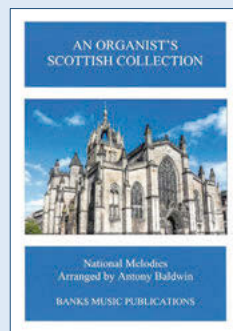
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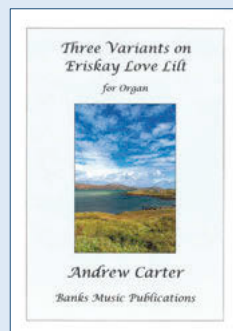
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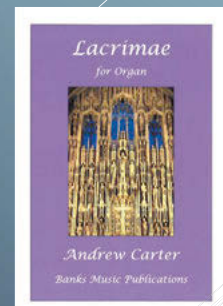
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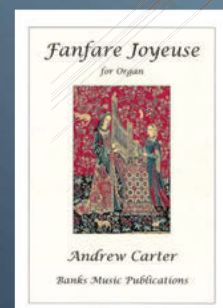
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Performance review

Late romantic British organ music left much to the imagination of the performer.

Daniel Cook steers a course through a host of possibilities

part 6 Charles Villiers Stanford: Organ Sonatas

Charles Villiers Stanford was born in Dublin in 1852, and from an early age he showed significant promise as a musician. He studied the organ with Robert Prescott Stewart (1825-94), who was organist of Christ Church and St Patrick's cathedrals. Stewart was very well travelled, and was particularly noted as a Bach exponent as well as being a gifted improviser. There can be no doubt that Stanford's lessons with Stewart, as well as frequent opportunities to observe his playing at the console, contributed significantly to his lifelong association with the organ, initially as a performer, and later as a composer of much important music for the instrument.

Later, Stanford studied at Cambridge University as organ scholar at Queens' College, before moving to Trinity College as organist and choirmaster in 1873. He continued at Trinity until 1892, and although he never again held an appointment as an organist, his constant flow of compositions for the instrument effectively made him the dominant figure of the UK organ scene until his death in 1924. His general output as a composer is vast, and includes symphonies, operas, songs, chamber music and a huge amount of excellent church music, but it's interesting to note that his organ works span almost his entire career. Of particular note are his five Organ Sonatas, all written during the first world war, between May 1917 and May 1918.

Performance practice in romantic British organ music can be something of an enigma. The extensive recordings available of music by Bairstow, Elgar, Howells and Stanford alone reveal almost limitless differences in



AUTHOR UNKNOWN/UK A.D. DOWNNEY

► Charles Villiers Stanford, c.1894

Ex.1: *Sonata Eroica* movement 1, p.6: the crescendo would be better achieved with the swell box, but the Great is uncoupled



Ex.2: *Sonata Eroica* movement 1, p.10: use contrasting orchestral solo stops in the RH, which could also include a Cor Anglais

Performance practice in romantic British organ music can be something of an enigma

◁ approach towards registration, articulation, and even tempi. It is by no means as straightforward as performing the music of Vierne, for instance, where it is understood that legato is the norm, *notes communes* are to be observed where appropriate, and the registrations are prescribed in a predictable and formulaic way.

One of the difficulties I find in British organ music is that many of us who perform it with any great frequency usually also spend a lot of time accompanying choirs singing music by the same composers. Here, it is expected that we will be adaptable and inventive, particularly in terms of articulation and registration, so there is a danger that we play the organ repertoire

with a certain degree of spontaneity, often with exploratory registrations. These might be quite appropriate while accompanying, but don't always do justice to the solo literature. Our difficulty is enhanced because of the varying nature of the organs we have available to us. British organs don't follow anything like the same formulae as those on the continent, and one has to be adaptable to the resources available. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that the performance of music by Stanford and his contemporaries can lend itself to a predetermined set of rules for registration, to serve as a basis from which to add the plethora of colour available in many of our best instruments – more on this later.

Stanford's organ music doesn't offer many clues as to his thoughts on registration, especially when an orchestral-style crescendo or diminuendo is required. He mostly limits himself to the usual 'Novello' indications of Great, Choir, Swell (sometimes unhelpfully listed as I, II, III), occasional references to coupling the Swell to the Great, add 4ft, Full Swell, and a few indications specifying the pitch of pedal stops. There are also occasional references to the use of reeds, either generally, or specifically as solo stops. The uncoupled Great indications are troublesome, particularly if Stanford then calls for a crescendo, or an extended passage at a low dynamic level. For example, page 6 of the first movement of the *Sonata Eroica* [Ex.1] presents a tricky passage: first, it is not clear what happens to the pedal, and second, Stanford calls for a crescendo while the Great is still uncoupled, which would be much better achieved with the swell box. Most people don't have access to an instrument with much variety on the Great in the softer registers, and an uncoupled Stopped Diapason or Hohl Flute, even used with a Dulciana or Salicional, can quickly become dull and repetitive in this repertoire. It is interesting to note that when Stanford was organist at Trinity College, Cambridge, the organ there had no fewer than eight stops at 8ft pitch on the Great. I suspect Stanford was usually following an established set of indications, possibly prescribed by a publisher or editor at some stage, and almost certainly based on what was convenient on the average organ at the time. Certainly, a Swell to Great reversible of some sort was relatively commonplace at the time the sonatas were written, but it doesn't necessarily mean he wasn't more inventive when he played himself, or that we have to follow his indications in the organ music slavishly.

When I recorded the complete organ music of Stanford, I used three different organs: the 1877 Father Willis organ at Salisbury Cathedral, the 1876 Willis/Harrison organ at Durham Cathedral, and the 1937 Harrison & Harrison organ in Westminster Abbey. All of these instruments have their own distinctive sound, but I used the same basic principles when registering on each organ, and despite a significant difference in size (Salisbury has 65 stops, Durham has 98), a systematic

approach is transferable between them.

The following gives my standard divisional piston settings for Salisbury Cathedral Organ, which are adaptable to most organs with sufficient pistons:

Great

1. Claribel Flute 8
2. Add Open Diap No.2
3. Add Open Diap No.1
4. Add Principal 4 No.2
5. Add Principal 4 No.1
6. Add Twelfth and Fifteenth
7. Add Diap. 16 and Mixture IV
8. Add Reeds 16, 8, 4

Swell

1. Lieblich, Viola, Vox Angelica 8
2. Lieblich, Viola 8, Flute 4
3. Diap., Lieblich 8, Flute 4, Oboe
4. Cancel Flute 4, add Octave 4
5. Add Super Octave 2
6. Add Trompette 8
7. Add Gamba and Fagotto 16
8. Add Mixture III and Clarion 4

Choir

1. Salicional 8
2. Add Harmonic Flute 8
3. Harmonic Flutes 8 and 4 only
4. Add Open Diap. 8
5. Add Gemshorn 4
6. Cancel Flute 4, add Flageolet 2
7. Add Lieblich 16
8. Add Trumpet 8

Solo

1. Cello, Celeste and Flute 8
2. Cello and Flute 8 plus octave coup.
3. Flute 8 only
4. Flutes 8 and 4
5. Clarinet 8 (possibly with Flute)
6. Orchestral Oboe 8 only
7. Cello, Fl, Cor, Clar, Oboe plus oct.
8. Tuba 8 only

Pedal

1. Bourdon and Lieblich 16
2. Plus Violone 16 and Flute 8
3. Plus Open Diap. No.2 16
4. Cancel Lieblich, plus Cello 8
5. Plus Open Bass 16 and Octave 8
6. Plus Viola 4
7. Plus Diap 32 and Mixture IV
8. Full (within reason)

Ex.3: Sonata Eroica movement 1, p.3: adding text to the notes aids phrasing and articulation



Using combinations similar to these, it is possible to register by numbers: Swell, Great, Choir and Pedal all on 5, for instance, making for a good ensemble. In general, if the Swell is always kept one piston ahead of the Great (and Choir), it is very difficult to find a sound which isn't cohesive. In this way, an orchestral-style crescendo (or diminuendo) can be arranged without an implausible change of colour. General pistons can be used, but the combinations should be assembled from the divisional piston settings, unless something special is required – and this is where the Solo Organ comes into its own. The combinations are given here mainly for interest, because the stops are usually added, like a paintbox of colours, to the basic foundation of the three main divisions, or as specific solo stops. It will be noted that the Swell Oboe is included early and stays on, and this is a particular feature of this repertoire, either as specified by Stanford himself, or being understood to have been widely used from surviving piston and combination pedal settings. It is also worth pointing out that the reeds come on before the mixtures on the Swell, but not the Great. This will vary from organ to organ, but as a general rule, Great to Mixture with Full Swell coupled should work well on any organ.

When playing Stanford's sonatas, I have found it necessary to adapt the composer's registrations to suit the size of the organ, but as a rule I try to change colour where he indicates, either specifically or as marked through dynamics. This music also lends itself to the use of solo stops, and these can be varied in an orchestral way – clarinet contrasted with oboe, phrase-by-phrase for instance [Ex.2] – even when not specified.

Independent Pedal registrations can also be employed, especially in the softer movements, and the uncoupled Great augmented with Choir or Solo stops to add variety. Stanford was a great orchestrator, and it is certainly worth exploring his instrumental music for ideas when registering.

Articulation is a divisive subject in many national schools, but we often don't apply the same rigour to British music as we would to German or French music, for instance. Ideally, Stanford's organ works should be played broadly legato, but not rigidly so, and certainly the context, both within the music and the building, should play a part. It is often effective to keep the Pedal legato but articulate one or both of the hands for clarity, or to point out something of interest, but we should avoid playing legato for extended periods without allowing the music to breathe. I find it helpful to add imaginary texts to the music to aid phrasing, both in terms of inflection and breathing [see Ex.3] and, as accompanists, this is perhaps the best way of marrying the dual disciplines we juggle every day. ■

Daniel Cook is master of the choristers and organist at Durham Cathedral, having been sub-organist at Westminster Abbey. He has released a critically acclaimed series of recordings of 19th- and 20th-century English repertoire on Priory Records.

Published in 1917 by Stainer & Bell, *Sonata Eroica* is now available either for PDF download (£6), or print-on-demand (£17.50) at stainer.co.uk/shop/n37268.



David Hill answers your questions about all matters relating to choirs and their conductors

Covid-19 and the consequences for singing – what can we be doing?

I am writing this during lockdown, but by the time it is published, things will hopefully have moved on in terms of how we go about life and interact. Meanwhile, there can be no doubt the coronavirus has affected all our lives in various ways. Everyone now knows, too well, the implications for the arts in its many forms, and no one is sure how and when they will return to a 'new normal'. We know that making music or producing good theatre doesn't mix with the levels of physical distancing that will be required for some time. Germany may have opened up (a little) but singing in church is *verboten*: apparently, it is purported that what we exhale, along with breath, has been diagnosed as a cause of spreading the virus. Meanwhile, what can we do? And how can we cope in the event of future lockdowns? There are a number of areas associated with singing we can continue to enjoy and develop.

Exercises

There are lots of exercises online to help singers stay vocally fit – a vocal replacement for physical fitness coach Joe Wicks! A little practice each day will be sufficient to keep you in shape. Google 'vocal exercise' and a stream of possibilities will appear.

Zoom

Many choirs are thinking about how to continue with rehearsals taking place on Zoom. I have watched this happen, very successfully, and have started workshops and some rehearsals with singers. So far, the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive and has been successful in engaging singers all over the world, as a recent Bach Choir 'Come and Sing' Fauré Requiem showed. Obviously, the chief disadvantage of anything 'virtual' is not being with others: we know that is the unique experience choral singing offers. However, using a Zoom rehearsal to learn notes, improving language skills and other technical tips can turn a rehearsal into a personal training session. Those directing sessions have to be ultra-organised in ensuring all their instructions can be understood. The process must not be hurried. While I think there is real potential for good work to be achieved for adult choirs in this way, I fear it isn't a mode of communication easily grasped by much younger choristers, many of whom feel too isolated and remote, I am told. Children thrive when they can be close together, working and learning as a team and in an atmosphere that is both disciplined and supportive.

Staying together

We need to support each other more than ever, and staying committed to your group will ensure it will survive. The resumption of normal rehearsals, concerts and choral services will eventually return like incredibly special friends we will want to embrace.

Socialise

It's never the same speaking to family and friends through Skype, Facetime or Zoom, because it is once removed from the real contact we all want to experience. But it does work, and you can even 'go to the pub' online to chat after a rehearsal. We need to take care these chat rooms are inclusive and don't lead to some feeling left out. Voice representatives or an individual can be given the responsibility for monitoring that. Invent choir quiz nights, repertoire sessions and

other ways of sharing knowledge, laughter and a common purpose.

Listen to music

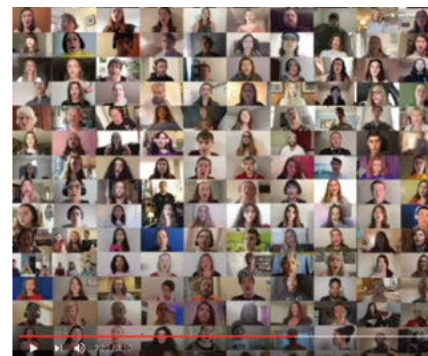
In addition to workshops, rehearsals, quiz and social events, together or personally, engage in this opportunity to listen to music – choral or otherwise. Apart from being a therapy, it widens our curiosity to experience the wonders of the arts, and music in particular in its many forms. If you are someone who needs guidance in that, or would like to be led to new, uncharted territory in repertoire, ask your conductor to provide lists of works and where they can be heard, bearing in mind YouTube is a vast resource.

Optimism

There isn't much around at present, but singing will return. We will have learned much from what has happened through this international pandemic. So, let's look forward to the moment we can sing together, hear orchestras and choirs, listen to amazing choral singing in our cathedrals and collegiate chapels, attend art galleries and theatres, as we will be reminded of the greatness and importance of the arts and the community which make them possible to exist and enjoy. ■

David Hill is musical director of The Bach Choir and Leeds Philharmonic Society, principal conductor of Yale Schola Cantorum, and associate guest conductor of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

▼ The internet can be used for individual vocal exercises, rehearsals, and performance



Do you have any questions relating to choral direction and singing? Send them to David Hill via the editor: maggie.hamilton@markallengroup.com

Jewel in the crown

In a place noted for violence, there's a quiet sanctuary tucked away, steeped in history and filled with unearthly choral music each Sunday. **Harriet Clifford** meets Colm Carey, master of music at the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London

If you look closely at the organ case in the Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula at the Tower of London, you will see a tiny open peapod tucked away near the bottom, roughly at eye-level. English woodcarver Grinling Gibbons was illiterate and used this by way of a signature – the story goes that the peapod would only be open if he had been paid for his work. This quirky titbit about the Chapel's organ case, originally built for the Banqueting House, Whitehall, is one of many interesting anecdotes shared by master of music Colm Carey as we wander around the small but impressive building, completed 500 years ago this year. Another is something that he had noticed only very recently: that the male stone figures lying on the tombs of those buried in the Chapel are raised an inch or so higher than the females beside them.

The Chapel Royal was, in Carey's words, a 'moveable feast' until the early 1700s, when the term became attached to several different buildings, such as those at St James's Palace, Hampton Court, and the two at the Tower of London. Before that, the Chapel Royal was a body of priests and musicians who travelled around with the monarch, providing 'spiritual sustenance' through performing the liturgy. Offering an informative overview of the history of music in the Chapel Royal, Carey explains that 'there have been waves of musical activity in the Chapel Royal; it hasn't been a constant thing throughout.' Although Henry VIII (1509-47) was very interested

in music, being a musician himself, the importance of music in the Chapel really came to the fore in the latter part of the 16th century after the Reformation.

'When Cranmer wrote the *Book of Common Prayer*,' explains Carey, 'he also stipulated that music should be very simple and intelligible to the average person and that there should be one syllable per note. The piece which demonstrates this best is *If ye love me* by Tallis.' As well as Tallis, this 'golden age' in the late 16th and early 17th centuries saw the liturgical music of Byrd, Gibbons, Blow and Purcell performed in the Chapels Royal, including possibly at the Tower. Throughout the 18th century, Handel wrote works for the Chapel, often rehearsing from the console of the Banqueting House organ in Whitehall: 'The inside of the instrument is new – built by the Canadian firm Orgues Létourneau in 1999 – but it's probably the case that he sat at.'

For an unknown reason, the next century saw less musical activity at the Tower, although Prince Albert was a great friend of Mendelssohn, even writing a piece himself – classical in style and occasionally

▲ The Imperial State Crown, worn by the monarch at the State Opening of Parliament, is on display in the Jewel House of HM Tower of London



ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II 2020



▲ (from top) The Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula, 500 years old, is located on Tower Green, behind the site of execution. The remains of three queens who were beheaded there are buried in the Chapel: Anne Boleyn (by Edouard Cibot), Katherine Howard (by Hans Holbein the Younger), and Jane Grey (by Paul Delaroche)

◀ performed by the Chapel's choir today. Throughout the 20th century, composers were again more involved with the royals, with Parry's *I was glad* written for the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902. When Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne, a volume of works was written for her, combining pieces by all the main composers of the time.

'It's too easy for what we do to be a niche thing, but I think it should be a global thing' – Colm Carey

The Chapel Royal choir, directed by Carey in his role as master of music since 2004, was founded by John Williams in 1966 and became fully professional the following year. 'It's been a small group of very dedicated people to keep things going for over 50 years. I think it's that kind of place; it just draws you in. I can't imagine doing this job anywhere else now – there is something really special about it.' Carey is keen to acknowledge the high calibre of musicians who have been part of the choir, mentioning Harry Christophers, Andrew Davis, Helen Charlston, Andrew Kennedy, Sarah Fox and David Stout: 'It's always been a choir of young professionals who are at the beginning of their careers.'

Today the choir is made up of 12 singers, including an ex-member of the Hilliard Ensemble, a member of Solomon's Knot and a student at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. 'It's a really satisfying place to produce music,' Carey explains. 'As you can see, it's quite intimate, so you can't hide behind anything. Therefore, you really have to be on top of what you're doing, and it demands a high level of music-making. There's no way around it: we have little reverberation in the chapel, so there's an immediacy of delivery that requires a lot of discipline.' For the singers, all of whom are making their way as freelance musicians, the Tower choir gives them a musical and spiritual home each Sunday.

In 2020, the Chapel's anniversary year, a schedule of services, concerts, radio and other events was planned, starting with BBC broadcasts in January and a liturgical performance of the *St John Passion* on Passion Sunday in March. While the broadcasts went ahead with much success, the Bach was cancelled and the status of all future events cast into uncertainty by the coronavirus crisis. Carey has commissioned composer Matthew Martin to write a *Te Deum* as part of the celebrations, the performance of which he hopes will still go ahead in September. The programme also included a series of lectures at the start of the year with former Bishop of London Richard Chartres, and historians Alison Weir and Tracy Borman, all of which went ahead, but a planned royal visit in July currently seems very unlikely.

In normal circumstances, the congregation on a Sunday is made up of people who enjoy traditional *Book of Common Prayer* liturgy, used by all the Chapels Royal as decreed by the Queen, which Carey describes as 'a work of art'. 'I've always thought that

when you go to a religious event it needs to have a sense of being other-worldly. There should be mystery, and the *Book of Common Prayer* creates that mystery.' He continues, 'The music we perform within that liturgy is incredibly rich – you don't need to be a believer to love the music, and there is no doubt that music itself provides deep spiritual nourishment. I think it creates a different space for people to inhabit, and that's a really special thing to be part of.'

At the same time, Carey has no qualms about admitting that most Londoners do not know that the Chapel even exists. 'We're always talking about how the Chapel can live a life where it is connected to the outside. It would be very easy for it to be this slightly anachronistic being that just keeps trundling along, but actually doesn't have any real resonance or relevance with what's going on in the modern world.' Some initiatives the Chapel has undertaken to alter this perception include making connections with Tower Hamlets food bank, as well as Lambeth Palace, from which young ordinands come to services and speak about what they are doing. Musically speaking, Carey explains, the choir has started doing more public concerts: 'We get a lot of people coming to the Chapel who wouldn't otherwise experience the place. We've built up a base of people who love to come to events here because of the sense of history combined with interesting programming, but also it's lovely to



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COURTESY/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

go to a concert where there is a real sense of intimacy to the music-making as the listener is close to the musical action, wherever they sit.'

The conversation has been skirting around a big question, which at this point comes to the fore: is there a place for liturgical music in a largely secular city? Carey's response is unequivocal: 'I think it does have a relevance and it does have a resonance. I've not known a single person who's come to a service here and hasn't been uplifted in some way. People who come never having been before often get completely blown away. That's not just to do with the music, but the whole experience, coming into this beautiful chapel, surrounded by the history, with this ancient liturgy.' Carey also ensures relevance by commissioning new works, such as Matthew Martin's *Te Deum* for the 2020 celebrations, pieces by James MacMillan and Francis Pott, and a new carol for Christmas each year.

'What I love about what we do is that we're able to sing music from the very early renaissance right up to the present day, and all of it has a place within our services,' Carey defends what might be described as 'bog-standard' choral repertoire, including Stanford, Bairstow and Dyson, saying, 'They wrote really well-crafted music for the Anglican liturgy.'

He continues emphatically: 'You have to see the composers in a much wider context to really understand their music. Therefore, the tradition that we promote through what we do is much greater than sometimes people give it credit for. That's what makes it exciting. It's too easy for what we do to be a niche thing, but I don't think it should be – it should be a global thing. Everyone should love it and want to experience it, and from time to time be challenged by it.'

'We live in this absolutely crazy world – we're clinging on for our dear lives. Even if it's just for an hour on a Sunday, I hope that what we do as church musicians provides a real place of calm and solace. I think that's incredibly important.' Carey is speaking

before the coronavirus crisis escalated into lockdown, in London and elsewhere, but today his words have more relevance than ever. Perhaps when all this is over, you'll step away from the crowds and duck into the Chapel, seeking musical revival at a time when we need it most. ■

▲ (this page) Master of music Colm Carey directs the Choirs of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London, in the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula: 'It's an intimate space – you can't hide behind anything'



COURTESY/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

Digital pioneer

Recent technology has revolutionised our planet, and not least the world of music.

Steven A. Markowitz relates the story of how his father, the founder of Allen Organ Company, pioneered digital organs 50 years ago. IMAGES COURTESY ALLEN ORGAN COMPANY



Throughout industries there are examples of individuals who have changed the larger world. Some are well-known, while others focused on their trade and avoided publicity. In the electronic keyboard industry, Jerome Markowitz not only invented the first fully electronic organ, but decades later would be responsible for the introduction of the world's first musical instrument utilising digital sampling. This is a history of how vision, ingenuity and dedication, along with a willingness to take on risk, would change the way electronic musical sounds are produced, with implications far beyond the organ market.

Digital sound is now ubiquitous, a part of all sound-producing products. However, not long before the advent of CDs and MP3, all sound was created through analogue technology. Remarkably, the roots of digital sound production emanated within the niche church organ field from a small company located in Macungie, Pennsylvania.

In 2021 it will be 50 years since the world's first digital musical instrument was offered for sale. The development and commercialisation of this revolutionary technology is a remarkable story of one man's dedication to creating electronic instruments of the highest fidelity.

In a sense, the impetus behind the technology that would lead to the digital organ and digital sound production was set in motion by US President John F. Kennedy, who in 1961 declared: 'I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him

◀ The newest Allen organs have touchscreen interface as well as convolution acoustics, smart phone accessibility/Wi-Fi connectivity, and 250 dynamic (changeable) high-definition voices

safely to the Earth.' The technology required to meet this ambitious goal had not yet been developed, but scientists and large companies were determined to meet the challenge.

Technological hurdles to be overcome before NASA could fulfil Kennedy's vision included the miniaturisation of computers so that complex calculations, such as telemetry, could be made by astronauts in real time in the Apollo capsule. In 1961 a computer capable of such calculations weighed thousands of pounds; it had to be miniaturised to the size of a small waste bin, requiring significant advancements in large-scale integrated circuits (LSI) technology. The aerospace company tasked with resolving this challenge was North American Aviation, later to become North American Rockwell.

Because of Rockwell's expertise in rocket technology, it was also a prime contractor for the Apollo programme, with thousands of employees dedicated to it. In 1966, three years before the first American would land on the moon, Rockwell understood that US spending on the Apollo programme would wane in a few years. To offset this inevitable revenue loss, Rockwell's management created a strategic plan for the company to utilise the advanced technology it developed for the space programme in commercial products. These products would then require Rockwell's LSI circuits and create a longer-term revenue stream. As the home organ business was booming in the mid-1960s, an idea spawned by one Rockwell scientist was to use digital technology to produce organ sounds.

Since Rockwell had no organ or music expertise, it needed a joint venture with an organ manufacturer to co-develop the digital organ. The plan was that Rockwell would supply the technology and LSI circuits, with the organ company supplying the musical and business expertise. Also, Rockwell, using a practice common with government contracts, expected the organ company to pay for the development cost for a commercially viable digital organ.

After a small proof of concept project, Rockwell contacted all the major American home organ manufacturers, including Hammond, Conn, and Wurlitzer, proposing a joint venture. While these companies were interested in the revolutionary technology,



▲ (l to r) In the late 1960s, IBM mainframe computers were necessary to prepare the pipe recordings for storage in the digital organs; Jerome Markowitz, who founded Allen Organ Company in 1937, was at the cutting edge of analogue sound technology

they were unwilling to invest in it until Rockwell would create an actual working organ. Rockwell was unwilling to make this investment and the digital organ project was on the verge of being cancelled. As a last-ditch effort to save the project, Rockwell contacted a small organ manufacturer, Allen Organ Company.

Allen Organ Company, founded by Jerome Markowitz in 1937, had always been at the cutting edge of analogue sound technology. While attending Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, Markowitz was enamoured by the sound of the pipe organ in the College's chapel. In his book, *Triumphs & Trials of an Organ Builder*, he stated: 'The intricate patterns of sound created by the big, sustained chords especially fascinated me.'

In the early 1930s, there was only one electric organ, the Hammond Organ. It was compact and inexpensive compared to pipe organs, which intrigued Jerome. However, the Hammond's electro-mechanical tone generation system could only create sounds appropriate for popular music; it could not produce sounds required for classical or liturgical music. Markowitz then decided to focus on producing pipe organ sounds through electronic tone production means.

Markowitz was a self-taught electronic engineer with expertise in radio and vacuum tube technologies. During the second world war he was sent to Hawaii to work



on advanced radar systems. Prior to the war, he resolved the technical problem that hindered the production of musical sounds by electronic means: the need for stable tuning oscillators. In 1938 he was granted the United States patent US2140267A for the stable oscillator. This technology would lead to the first fully electronic organ and the birth of Allen Organ Company.

Through the 1950s and 60s, Markowitz introduced numerous innovations and was granted patents that included low frequency oscillators (US2190078A), space discharge harmonic generator (US2329069A0), rotatable loud-speakers (Gyrophonic) with stationary baffle (US2491674A), circuit for tuning oscillators (US2939359A), and Chiff characteristics (US2989886A), solidifying Allen's leadership in analogue organ technology. The company enjoyed significant success, with thousands of analogue organ installations made worldwide.

By 1967, when Rockwell approached Allen about the joint venture, Markowitz was the world's premier analogue tone generation engineer. He immediately understood the revolutionary potential of digital tone generation, later called 'sampling'. He focused on the technology's ability to accurately reproduce complex pipe organ waveshapes. For years, he had struggled with analogue technology's limitations to create realistic organ principal stops, the foundation sounds >

◀ for classical pipe organs; but by the mid-1960s he had concluded the technology had limitations and reached its zenith. Therefore, he was willing to radically change the company's technology and direction to accomplish his tonal goals.

In 1967, when Allen Organ Company entered the joint venture with Rockwell, Markowitz bet the company's future on the technology – a risky bet. To produce a commercially viable digital organ would ultimately require 13 unique custom LSI circuits, a project so large that nothing of similar scope had yet been attempted by any commercial company in any field. In fact, the Allen digital organ would be only the second commercial product ever to utilise custom LSI circuits, the first being the Sharp calculator. The technology behind these

circuits was then known as MOS (metal-oxide-semiconductor).

As a young teenager in 1967, while aware of the digital organ project, I did not understand its significance. But in 1969, in the same week that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, I visited Rockwell facilities in Anaheim and El Segundo, California, with my father; there I was instructed on LSI technology by Rockwell engineers, and saw a demonstration of laser technology. I recall being schooled on Epitaxy growth, a basic process for the creation of MOS circuits – heady stuff for a 15-year old!

The joint venture called for Allen to invest US\$2 million in the digital organ's development – a massive amount for a company with sales of less than US\$8 million. After the agreement was signed,

the engineering work on the digital organ would take over three years and required significant technical issues to be resolved. More than a year into the digital organ's development, significant tuning deficiencies were discovered by Allen, an issue Rockwell had not recognised during the development. Ironically, this was an issue that my father's invention had resolved 30 years earlier for analogue tone-generation technology. Once again, the project was almost cancelled. Ultimately, the problem was resolved, but required additional hardware and increased engineering development time.

While advanced technology was a crucial component for developing a digital organ, technological-artistic input was also required in the recording and processing of pipe sounds. Cohesive ensembles had made the pipe organ the 'King of Instruments', and this was also a requirement for a successful digital organ. These musical-engineering tasks were the responsibility of Allen Organ Company, more specifically Markowitz.

Digital sampling begins with recording pipes, with this information ultimately stored in the organ for playback. Markowitz spent months experimenting with different means to record organ pipes for sampling. The simplest method is to place the microphone out in the building in which the organ is installed, distant from the pipes, and to just record from one location. This technique was found to be unacceptable, since the recordings would also include distortions caused by the building, as well as extraneous room noises captured during the recording process that were accentuated by the higher microphone input gains needed to capture the distant pipe sounds. Any attempt to eliminate the unwanted noises through filtering mutated the original pipe sound. This recording technique is known as 'wet sampling'.

Some companies today offer 'virtual organs' using PC tone generation and wet samples, a recording method that offers advantages to these suppliers. Wet sampling is a simpler and less expensive process for recording pipes. In addition, wet samples require less processing power and therefore allow for the use of less powerful tone generators. With wet samples there is little attempt (or ability) to optimise individual sounds or how they work together within

▼ Randy Miller, tonal director, sampling pipe sound



ensembles. What is recorded is what you get, including room distortions and extraneous noises. And last, wet samples include some of the original room's acoustics that then come in conflict with the acoustics of the building in which the digital organ is ultimately installed.

To create pure pipe sounds, Markowitz learned that the microphone needed to be

Markowitz the coveted IR-100 Award for one of 100 most significant innovations of that year, and the first instrument is housed at the Smithsonian Institution. This technology brought sampled pipe organ sounds to churches worldwide, many of whom could not afford a pipe organ.

The Allen Organ Company/North American Rockwell joint venture was not

After Allen introduced the world's first digital organ in 1971, it was quickly recognised for its tonal quality and revolutionary technology

placed very close to each pipe, which also offered the optimal signal-to-noise ratio for the recordings. These pure sounds could then be processed, as all sample sounds must be prior to being stored in a digital organ, without the distortions and extraneous room noises. This 'dry sampling' technique, which Allen continues to use to this day, allows the digital sounds to be individually voiced, as a pipe technician needs to voice individual pipes. This process leads to the grand ensembles found in fine pipe organs. It is tedious work, whether the sounds are produced from wind pipes or digital sampling. After the pipe recordings were made, significant musical engineering work was required to prepare them for storage in the organ. In the late 1960s this necessitated the use of a large IBM mainframe computer, which was a rare thing. GAC (General Acceptance Corporation), a financial company in Allentown, Pennsylvania, allowed my father access to their computer. These sampled sounds were then worked on for many hours using the secret engineering model located in our house. This work had to be nearly perfect since, at the time, all sampled sounds were encoded at great expense in hard memories, with Allen having to commit to the purchase of thousands of these unchangeable LSI memory circuits.

After Allen introduced the world's first digital organ in 1971, it was quickly recognised for its tonal quality and revolutionary technology. The Allen Digital Computer Organ would precede most competing digital church organs by more than 15 years. The invention earned Jerome

without strains. After the introduction of the Allen Digital Computer Organ at the 1971 National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) show in Chicago, a conflict developed between the companies. Rockwell started to market the technology to other companies, despite the joint venture agreement requiring Allen's approval first. At the NAMM show, Rockwell brought in approximately 20 Yamaha engineering personnel, as well as its president, Genichi Kawakami, for a private showing of the Allen Digital Organ. Though Allen's focus at that time was on stabilising the digital technology and production requirements for the organs, Rockwell's was to maximise the sale of LSI circuits, turning to the larger home organ market in which Yamaha was a growing force. The disagreement grew and led to lengthy litigation, which ended in Allen's favour.

By the mid-1970s Allen had resolved the technical and production challenges with the digital organ. Allen owned the musical instrument patents for digital sound technology, and the digital organ dominated the church organ market. The company then made the strategic decision not to monopolise the technology, but instead to offer patent licenses to other organ and synthesizer manufacturers, ultimately entering into agreements with most keyboard musical instrument manufacturers, including Yamaha. Those that did not take a license remained committed to analogue technology until the patents expired in the late 1980s.

The basic Rockwell technology was utilised by Allen until 1982, with



▲ Jerome Markowitz receiving the IR-100 Award for significant innovation for his work in creating the Allen Digital Computer Organ

generational leaps made since. Allen's latest GeniSys™ Technology features not only advanced digital tone generation, but a user-friendly touchscreen interface, convolution acoustics, smart phone accessibility/Wi-Fi connectivity, and 250 dynamic (changeable) high-definition voices. In addition, through proprietary voicing software and its SoundMatrix™ Library, Allen voicers can meet the tastes and expectations of even the most demanding organist. Finally, Allen's Stoplist Library™ allows organists to explore different schools of organ building including American Classic, English Cathedral, Cavaillé-Coll, Arp Schnitger, Schlicker, Aeolian-Skinner, as well as multiple theatre organ suites, at the touch of a screen.

Thanks to Markowitz's vision and dedication, Allen Organ Company was the innovator for both analogue and digitally sampled organs. My father passed away in 1991, a year after I became president of Allen. The mission of the company remains unchanged to this day: to bring the finest pipe organ sounds produced electronically to churches and consumers worldwide. ■ *Throughout Allen Organ Company's eight-decade history, it has installed some 80,000 instruments in over 70 countries and employed thousands of workers.*

Steven A. Markowitz is the president of Allen Organ Company and the son of its founder, Jerome Markowitz.



Folk music, Orthodox chant, and much more besides – Serbia's musical landscape is at your fingertips in Belgrade, writes **Ivan Moody**

Belgrade means 'white city'. That name may sound somewhat strange applied to a modern Balkan capital rapidly now entering the redevelopment race as it learns to cope with unprecedented waves of tourists, at the same time as it still manifests the ravages of the communist past and NATO bombing. But when you stand on a sunny day on the ramparts of the famous fortress, at the confluence of the Danube and Sava

rivers, you can understand why it would have been so called. In fact, the city has had other names: the Celts called it Singidun, and it was later occupied by the Romans, who latinised this to Singidunum.

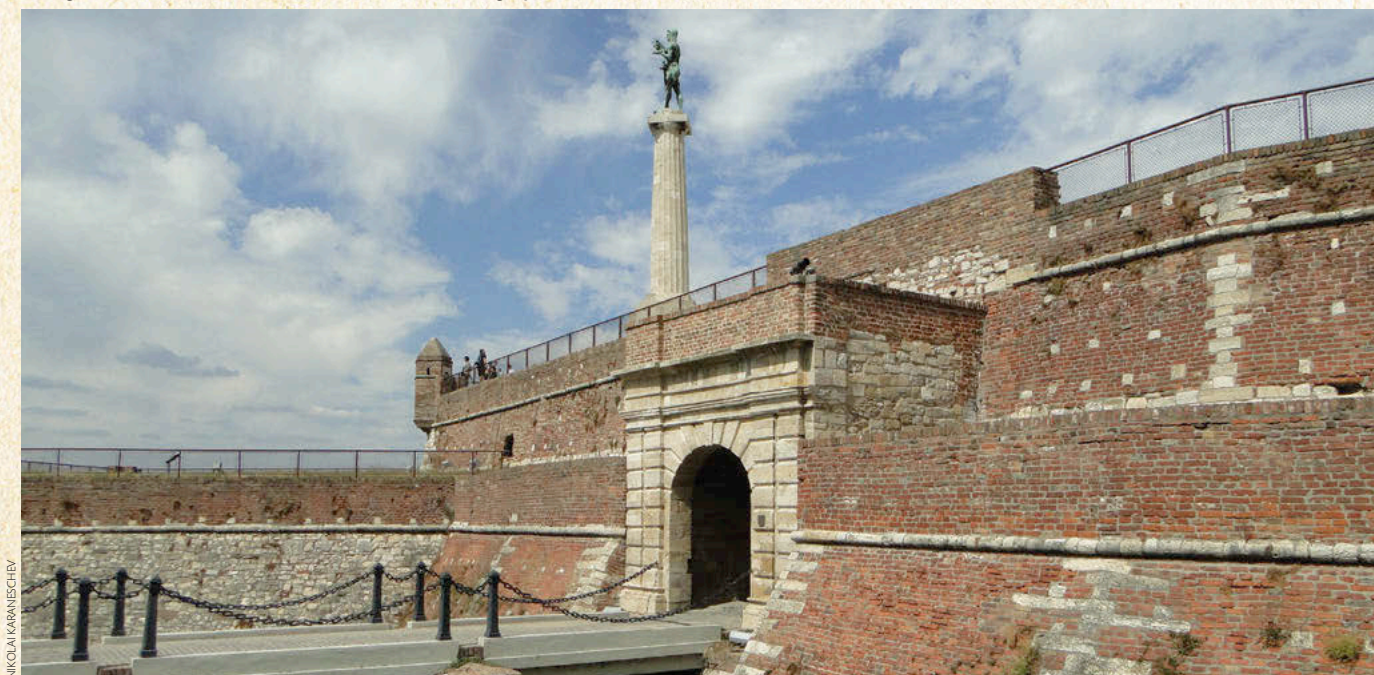
The city's history naturally reflects Serbia's complex history, forged as it was not only by indigenous culture, but by its subjugation by the Ottomans and the Habsburgs, and by the great experiment

of Yugoslavia, which began with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 and ended after civil unrest in the early 1990s. In fact, much of this may be seen in microcosm in the rich and varied architectural legacy to be seen within the fortress, whose grounds are with some frequency nowadays used for open-air concerts.

Naturally, Belgrade has been home to a vibrant musical tradition. The turbo-folk that you hear played by itinerant groups as you walk through Knez Mihailova in the city's bustling centre is far from demonstrating the richness of that tradition, encompassing as it does a remarkably rich seam of folk music, Serbian Orthodox chant, a magnificent choral tradition – the role of the composer and ethnomusicologist Stevan Mokranjac (1856-1914) is fundamental here – and, since the 19th century, a positive flood of composers and performers, many of whom went abroad to learn and returned to their native country to create a new tradition of solo, chamber and orchestral music, and opera, inspired by the new vistas opening up elsewhere in Europe.

One of the most noteworthy means of keeping Serbian musical traditions alive was the creation of Singing Societies. The First Belgrade Singing Society was begun in 1853

▼ Belgrade Fortress: Serbia's rich and varied architectural legacy in microcosm



NIKOLA KARANJEVIĆ



▲ (from left) Engraving of the composer Petar Konjović by Tomislav Krizman, 1917; the National Theatre in Republic Square, 1934

by Milan Milovuk, and is the oldest in the country after that of Pančevo, founded in 1838. The archive of the Society is a treasure trove, and one of the most remarkable things about it is that, in addition to a vast collection of both sacred and secular music by Serbian and other Slavic composers, there is a group of works by renaissance composers including Byrd, Marenzio, Palestrina, Robert White and also madrigals by Monteverdi. The sacred works originally in Latin have translations in Church Slavonic, and the secular pieces have singing translations in modern Serbian. All these were introduced into the choir's repertoire by the extraordinary conductor and composer Kosta Manojlović (1890-1949), who had studied in Oxford; he was also responsible for the first performance of Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* on Serbian soil, in 1925. These pioneering efforts had already borne fruit in the establishment of conservatory-level education in Belgrade in 1899; the Music Academy, which subsequently became the Faculty of Music of the University of Arts, was founded in 1937, and the composer Petar Konjović (1883-1970) began the Musicological Institute, as part of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in 1948.

The Belgrade Music Festival (Bemus) was founded in 1969, and in recent years it has hosted, among many others, the Concertgebouw, the New York Philharmonic, Marta Argerich, Renaud Capuçon and Maxim Vengerov. For its 50th anniversary last year, artists included

Angela Gheorghiu and Charles Castronovo, Balkan jazz trumpeter Duško Goyković, and British vocal ensemble The Queen's Six. Most of the festival's concerts are held in the Kolarac Hall, home of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra and host to all kinds of chamber and orchestral events throughout the year. It is part of a cultural complex conceived by the architect Petar Bajalović, and was begun in 1929, a period of expansion for Belgrade in its role as the capital of the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Theatre is the magnificent building of Radio Belgrade, completed in a mere two years by Bogdan Nestorović in 1933, and initially intended to house the Zanatski dom, the Artisans' Club. Above the entrance is a carving of two white doves, with a craftsman and an anvil, symbolising not only the Club but the inn which originally stood on the site, *Kod dva bela goluba* ('At the house of the two white doves'). Radio Belgrade has played a hugely important role in the cultural life of the city, currently

During the NATO bombing, the National Theatre stayed open, with entrance of less than a penny

Also in the 50th anniversary edition was a production of the opera *Koštana* by Petar Konjović, a dazzling, folk-inspired work dating from 1931 based on the play of the same name by Borislav Stanković (1876-1927), itself probably the most staged work in Serbian cultural history. The opera took place in the National Theatre, located on the Trg republike, or Republic Square. The building was begun in 1868, but has been subsequently rebuilt more than once, and has recently been the object of a major reconstruction. It was damaged in the German bombing of the city in 1941, but not during the 78 days of the NATO bombing of 1999, during which period it kept its doors open and gave plays, operas and ballets, the public entrance fee being 1 dinar (equivalent of less than a penny).

Just down the street from the National

with four different stations, and possessing a tremendous archive of recordings and a series of different performing groups, including the RTS Symphony Orchestra (founded in 1937), the RTS Big Band (1948), the RTS Choir (1939), two children's choirs (1947 and 1963), a folk orchestra (1935) and a folk ensemble (1981).

All these cultural delights should be enjoyed, of course, interspersed with the habitually large helpings of Serbian food, perhaps some *ćevapčići* with a *šopska salata* (skinless sausage with a mixed tomato salad), washed down with a glass of quince *rakija* and, if you can find it, some Serbian cherry pie. One thing is certain: you won't go home hungry for either culture or food. ■ *Belgrade is served by all major airlines, and its public transport of trams, buses and trolleybuses is easy to use.*

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PIERRE VILLETTE

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GRAHAM WALLHEAD

▲ Composer Ian Venables, whose *Requiem* receives its premiere recording

As a metaphor, *Lux aeterna* (Eternal light) has, for me, a transcendental resonance – one that connects our inner world with the spiritual world that lies “beyond the veil”. So composer Ian Venables writes about the last movement of his **Requiem**, the premiere recording of which is to be released in July, performed by the Choir of Gloucester Cathedral with Jonathan Hope (organ) under the direction of Adrian Partington [Somm SOMMCD 0618].

Of all the large-scale liturgical works, it is perhaps the *Requiem* that gives the composer

the greatest freedom for personal expression, as much in the texts they choose to omit as in those they set to music. Unlike some composers, notably Brahms and Britten, Venables has stayed with movements from the Latin rite, eschewing the fiery *Dies Irae* sequence (except for the supplicatory *Pie Jesu*) in favour of more contemplative words. The exception is the *Libera Me* section, which John Quinn describes in his liner notes as ‘urgent, powerful, impassioned ... The effect is of a remorseless tread, like an implacable march to the grave.’ Closing the work with

a ‘serene and warm’ *Lux Aeterna*, Venables nevertheless avoids a gentle ending, writes Quinn: ‘The music unexpectedly moves into bright B major at “Et lux perpetua”. With this key choice the music becomes ecstatic. From here on the music grows louder and more confident – one of the last markings in the score is “with warm cheerful radiance”. It is as if both singers and listeners are walking confidently forward towards perpetual light.’

Other choral releases include **Pious Anthems and Voluntaries** [Signum SIGCD 624], the culmination of Michael Finnissy’s residency with the Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge; world premiere recordings of Eric Whitacre’s **The Sacred Veil** [Signum SIGCD 630] and Ethel Smyth’s choral symphony **The Prison** [Chandos CHSA 5279]; and the latest in Hyperion’s musical trawl through the Habsburg dynasty – **Johannes de Cleve: Missa Rex Babylonis** [CDA 68241] – presented by Cinquento (see feature, p.23).

In keyboard releases, Bach specialists Masato and Masaaki Suzuki perform on the first volume of **J.S. Bach: Harpsichord Concertos** [BIS 2401]; and a programme of organ works by Carson Cooman, **Invocazione brillante** [Divine Art DDA 25205], is performed by Philip Hartmann on the 2013 Link-Gaida organ in the Pauluskirche, Ulm. ■

CHORAL CDS

Johannes de Cleve (1528/9-82): Missa Rex Babylonis and other works
Cinquento
Hyperion CDA 68241

Michael Finnissy: Pious Anthems & Voluntaries
Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge, Glen Dempsey, James Anderson-Besant (org), Sarah O’Flynn (fl)/Andrew Nethsingha
Signum SIGCD 624

Journeys to the New World: Hispanic Sacred Music from the 16th & 17th Centuries
The Queen’s Six
Signum SIGCD 626

Penderecki: St Luke Passion
Sarah Wegener (s), Lucas Meachem (bar), Matthew Rose (b), Slawomir Holland (spkr), Warsaw Boys’ Choir, Kraków Philharmonic Choir, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal/Kent Nagano
BIS 2287

Matthew Pott: At First Light
Commotio/Matthew Berry
Naxos 8.573976

Ethel Smyth: The Prison (Choral Symphony)
Sarah Brailey (s), Dashon Burton (b-bar), Experiential Orchestra & Chorus/James Blachly
Chandos CHSA 5279

Ian Venables: Requiem
Choir of Gloucester Cathedral, Jonathan Hope (org)/

Adrian Partington
Somm SOMMCD 0618

Eric Whitacre: The Sacred Veil
LA Master Chorale, Jeffrey Zeigler (vc), Lisa Edwards (pno)/
Eric Whitacre
Signum SIGCD 630

KEYBOARD CDS

J.S. Bach: Harpsichord Concertos, vol.1
Masato Suzuki (hpschd)
Bach Collegium Japan/Masaaki Suzuki
BIS 2401

Invocazione Brillante – Organ Music by Carson Cooman
Philip Hartmann, Pauluskirche, Ulm, Germany
Divine Art DDA 25205



REVIEWS

Rating: ★★★★★ Highly recommended ★★★★★ Very good ★★★★★ Good ★★★★★ Average ★ Poor



THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS

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Rebecca Tavener

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Jeremy Summerly

Chris Bragg
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John Maidment
Brian Morton
Anne Page
David Ponsford
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Philip Reed
Clare Stevens

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KEYBOARD CDS

J.S. Bach: Harpsichord Concertos BWV 1052, 1053, 1055, 1058

Francesco Corti (hpschd),
Il pomo d'oro
Pentatone PTC 5816 837 [64:08]
★★★★★



This is the first of two CDs to record the complete cycle of J.S. Bach's

harpsichord concertos. Francesco Corti has used the evidence of a separate harpsichord continuo in BWV 1055 to record these concertos with two harpsichords and a fairly large string ensemble (3.3.2.1.1). The ambience of Zimmerman's coffee-house in Leipzig is well projected through close microphone positions, so that even the players' breathing and some extraneous sounds are present. However, the fast tempi, rhythmic drive and explosive accents result in performances that are exhilarating. But Corti finds the time for expressive cadenzas, and the middle movements are beautifully controlled.

DAVID PONSFORD

Awesome Organ

Various artists, various organs
Naxos 8.578179 [74:57]
★★★



Awesome Organ is a smorgasbord of organ lollipops drawn from the

Naxos back catalogue and includes recordings from as far back as 1988 and as recently as 2007. It is a serviceable, if hardly original (or particularly engaging), meander through the organ's history from Pachelbel and Böhm, Buxtehude and Bach to Widor, Dupré and Poulenc via Handel, Mendelssohn,

Gigout and Alain. Repertoire choices are predictable, with performances of variable quality from assorted names. Two stars on the strength of Philippe Lefebvre's scene-stealing excerpts from Poulenc's whimsically inventive G minor Organ Concerto.

MICHAEL QUINN

Johann Sebastian Bach: Complete Works for Keyboard vol.3 – In the French Style

Benjamin Alard (hpschd & org)
Harmonia mundi
HMM 902457.59 (3CDs) [3:29:19]
★★★



Here we have harpsichord works on CDs 1 and 3, and organ works

on CD2. An 18th-century harpsichord in Château d'Assas and a copy of Carl Conrad Fleischer of 1720 are both fine-sounding, and well recorded, while the organ is the Andreas Silbermann of 1710 in Marmoutier. Benjamin Alard attempts to give some context to the French style in Bach's output, which in some respects he achieves. The harpsichord discs are more successful than that for organ, containing mainly suites by Bach, some not so well-known. The 'English' Suite in A minor BWV 807 illustrates Alard's fine playing, well-paced and with a lovely sense of style. This can also be heard in the F major 'English' suite, where subtle *inégalité* is quite correctly introduced. A fine Praeludium & Chaconne by Fischer, and two works by François Couperin neatly link with other music that will have influenced Bach.

On the organ CD, the French influence is marked simply by the nature of the organ, perfect in works by Grigny and Raison,

and instructive in two groups of Bach chorales with such a French flavour. However, the *Pièce d'orgue* suffers from an excessively fast opening section, and given the ornamented arpeggio notation of the final section, it is odd that this is played so very slowly. The final major work is the Passacaglia, which really is too fast, making much of the intricate passagework a scramble, and hardly giving the organ time to breathe. The link between Passacaglia and Fugue is musically disastrous, as it makes the fugue appear to start on the second note of the subject! So buy this set for the lovely harpsichord playing, but it is disappointing in those major organ works.

DOUGLAS HOLICK

Duruflé: The Complete Organ Works

Francesca Massey, Harrison & Harrison organ, Durham Cathedral

Priory Records PRCD 1230 [77:23]
★★★★★



Francesca Massey takes her leave of Durham Cathedral, where

she was sub-organist for several years until 2019, with this elegantly dispatched Duruflé survey. The cathedral's venerable organ (built by 'Father' Willis and serially remodelled by Harrison & Harrison) serves the material well, as does Massey in considered playing as concentrated as it is poetic. She is at her most eloquent where the contemplative meets the ecstatic, as in the op.4 *Prélude, Adagio et Choral varié sur le theme du 'Veni creator'* and in the beautifully formed four-part harmonies of *Chant donné*. The

Paul Dukas-dedicated op.5 *Suite* is delivered with persuasive, adroitly controlled power.

MICHAEL QUINN

Sigfrid's Unbeaten Tracks

Graham Barber, Link/Gaida organ, Pauluskirche, Ulm
Fugue State Records FSRC016 [70:53]
★★★★★



With this CD of transcriptions of works by Karg-Elert, Graham

Barber augments his considerable reputation as a performer of music from the high romantic period. The title's 'unbeaten tracks' refers to the relatively little-known repertoire he has chosen to transfer from the single-manual art-harmonium, with its sophisticated expressive potential, to a mammoth organ of 86 stops. The composer himself arranged two movements of his symphonic-scale Second Sonata op.46 for organ, and the work deserves to gain a much wider audience. The smaller-scale Portraits op.101 make a less happy transition, losing the freshness offered by the harmonium's intimate control of dynamic.

ANNE PAGE

Bill Evans on the Organ

David Schollmeyer, Große Kirche Bremerhaven
Dabringhaus und Grimm
MDG 906 2159-6 [66:51]
★★★★★



Undeniably one of the greatest jazz piano legends, Bill Evans influenced generations of jazz pianists, and many of his compositions (like *Waltz for Debby*) have become jazz standards. How well this translates to the organ is

debatable, particularly when many of the pieces on this SACD album were originally trio pieces. In many cases the lack of drum kit and double bass removes much of the rhythmic impetus. This can make jazz on the organ fall rather flat; but David Schollmeyer is very deft at translating the bass to the pedals, and a prompt-speaking 16ft Principal gives a pretty good imitation of a walking bass. It is also clear that Schollmeyer is himself a jazz pianist, and he finds sufficiently varied colour from the Beckerath organ to match the different styles and textures of these improvisations. Evans's trademarks included the use of impressionist harmony and 'vocal' melodic lines, and these are particularly evident in *Peace Piece*, which is a highlight of this album.

RUPERT GOUGH

Saint-Saëns: *Symphonie no.3 'Organ'*; Poulenc: *Organ Concerto*

Iveta Apkalna, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons (dir)
BR Classik 900178 [60:47]

★★★★



Although not clear from the CD information, this is a live concert

recording from the Munich Philharmonie made eight months before Mariss Jansons's death at the end of 2019. Right from the start, it is clear that Jansons is going to draw out every nuance and detail from Saint-Saëns's score. The most intimate moments of it are beautifully rendered by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, though the Finale feels rather more lacklustre with what should be the star of the show (the organ) appearing

somewhere in the background. Indeed, the entry of the organ in the second movement is an almost inaudible disappointment, with bland registration. Poulenc's *Organ Concerto* fares much better, with Iveta Apkalna finding more opportunity to sparkle, and with a good balance against some exquisite string-playing.

RUPERT GOUGH

Franz Liszt: *Complete Organ Works vol.1*

Zuzana Ferjenčíková, Aloys Mooser organ (1834), Cathédrale Saint-Nicolas, Fribourg, Switzerland
MDG 906 2140-6 [76:23]

★★★★



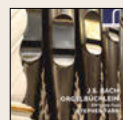
It is interesting that the series which will emanate from this

disc is to be a 'Complete' *Organ Works* of Liszt, MDG having released two volumes of Liszt's 'Organ Works' in 2005 (*Schönheit/Merseburg*). In fact, there is no crossover at all between those discs and this new first volume by the virtuosic Zuzana Ferjenčíková, which pairs the initial (1855) version of 'BACH' with transcriptions of music by Bach, Liszt himself, Lasso (a motet 'intabulation' heard on the famous Aloys Mooser organ on the west wall of Fribourg Cathedral, and again on the 17th-century Manderscheidt organ in the chancel), and the rollicking *Ein feste Burg* overture by Otto Nicolai. The Mooser organ is significantly underrepresented in the catalogue, and it's wonderful to hear its dark choruses, infinite 8ft colour and hushed Echowerk in this repertoire. Liszt himself performed on it in 1836; George Sand's description of his visit is ▶

J.S. Bach: *Orgelbüchlein, BWV 599-644*

Stephen Farr, organ by Tobias Heinrich Gottfried Trost (1730), Stadtkirche, Waltershausen, Thuringia
Resonus RES 10259 [79:02]

★★★★★



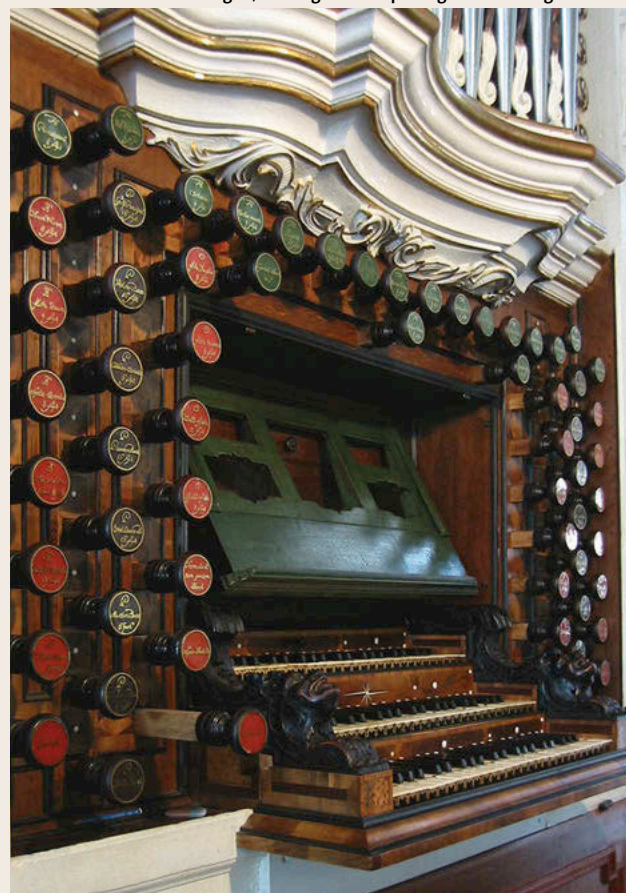
Full marks to Stephen Farr for recording the *Orgelbüchlein* on the largest baroque organ in Thuringia, therefore supporting its authenticity as a Bach organ. Farr uses the large array of 8ft stops to colourful effect, reserving the impressive *plenum* for such pieces

'Farr uses the large array of 8ft stops to colourful effect'

as *Heut triumphieret Gottes Sohn*. Eighteenth-century organs are challenging to play, with noisy actions, un-ergonomic pedalboards, etc., but Farr's tempi sound natural, with expressive nuances well-moulded into the overall metrical structure. The modified meantone temperament makes perfect sense of the harmonies in *O Mensch, beweine deine Sünde gross* and other pieces that exploit chromaticism for expressive purposes.

DAVID PONSFORD

▼ Waltershausen's Trost organ, the largest baroque organ in Thuringia



STEPHEN BICKNELL

◀ the first account of the composer's organ playing. Ferjenčíková's performances are passionate and brilliant – perhaps, sometimes, a little too brilliant for the organ and its winding, which occasionally struggles to keep up (BACH: 08'00"–08'40" for example). Very enjoyable nonetheless.

CHRIS BRAGG

Erkki Salmenhaara (1941–2002): Complete Music for Solo Organ

Jan Lehtola, Veikko Virtanen organ (1980), Turku Cathedral
Toccata Classics TOCC 0515

[56:34]

★★★



The foreboding face of the influential Finnish composer and

musicologist Erkki Salmenhaara on the front cover of this release seems rather to foretell the uncompromising music which comprises his solo organ oeuvre. By ordering the pieces chronologically, however, Jan Lehtola illustrates the gradual softening of Salmenhaara's modernist idiom, which characterised his compositional development. The opening three-movement Toccata, written in 1965 shortly after the composer's sojourn as a pupil of Ligeti, is all concrete brutality, clusters and all. Later works such as the Canzona (with its extended repetition of a lilting rhythmic figure over a pedal point) and the 1985 Introduction & (fleeting) Toccata are altogether more human or 'neo-simplistic' as the critics put it. Lehtola's playing and programme notes are outstanding, and the glassy chill of the Virtanen organ at Turku fits the music like a glove.

CHRIS BRAGG

CHORAL CDS

Distler, Zimmermann: Sacred choir and organ music

Christina Roterberg (s),
Norddeutscher Kammerchor
/ Maria Jürgensen (dir); Arvid
Gast, Stellwagen organ, St Jakob,
Lübeck

MDG Scene MDG 902 2156-6
(SACD) [55:02]

★★★★★



In a word: blissful. Here is a sublime compendium of Hugo Distler's

sacred music for choir and organ in rewarding SACD-recorded sound. Maria Jürgensen and the Norddeutscher Kammerchor make much – and with enormous, affecting sympathy – of the composer's rich, respectful take on Reformation-era Lutheran melodies, with soprano Christina Roterberg a nuanced interpreter of his distinctive, often ethereal, word setting. Heinz Werner Zimmermann's *Choral Variations on a Theme of Hugo Distler* – the *Nürnberg Grosses Gloria* – is a fitting, evocative filler. Arvid Gast provides sympathetic accompaniment to Roterberg in three sacred concert pieces and, sweetly so, in the op.18 no.2 Organ Sonata. Highly recommended.

MICHAEL QUINN

Vexilla Regis: A sequence of music from Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday

Choir of Westminster Cathedral,
Peter Stevens (org) / Martin
Baker (dir)

Ad Fontes AF 002 [79:22]

★★★★★



C&O needs an extra five-star *summa cum laude* category for discs

like this. Despite being recorded in Buckfast Abbey rather than in their own home, it captures the superlative essence of Westminster Cathedral Choir, with the added poignancy of being one of the last (possibly *the* last) recording to be made under the direction of Martin Baker, who resigned at the end of last year. Their journey through Holy Week demonstrates, as you would expect, their unique skill in singing Gregorian chant, which comes from the discipline of daily performance and familiarity with the liturgy, combined with an aspiration towards musical perfection and beauty that is unerringly achieved. The same exquisite balance between musical and spiritual intention can be heard throughout the disc, but particularly in two motets by Byrd – *Ne irascaris, Domine* and *Civitas sancti tui* – where every phrase is mellifluously shaped, the choral lines are handed seamlessly from one voice part to another, and cadences hang like gossamer in the air before resolving with haunting wistfulness. The disc opens with the fanfare *Ingrediente Domino* by George Malcolm, one of the cathedral's most distinguished masters of the music; highlights also include a lovely acclamation for Maundy Thursday by Martin Baker's predecessor James O'Donnell, followed by an extended setting of *Postquam surrexit Dominus* by Baker himself, beginning with harmonisations of plainsong and moving into what Jeremy Summerly describes in the notes as 'a kaleidoscopic polystylism', full of suspensions and close harmony. The CD was the perfect companion in a Holy Week devastated by the Covid-19 lockdown; and at a time when

the future of Westminster Cathedral Choir itself apparently hangs in the balance, it is sadly fitting that its journey ends on Holy Saturday with the bittersweet setting of the hymn 'Praise to the holiest' by R.R. Terry, the cathedral's first master of the music, rather than with a celebration of Easter Day.

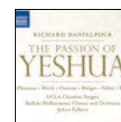
CLARE STEVENS

Richard Danielpour: The Passion of Yeshua in 14 Scenes

Hila Plitmann (s), J'nai Bridges (m-s), Timothy Fallon (t),
Matthew Worth (bar), Kenneth
Overton (bar), James K. Bass
(bar), Buffalo Philharmonic
Chorus, UCLA Chamber Singers,
Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra /
JoAnn Falletta (dir)

Naxos 8.559885-86 [1:43:23]

★★★★★



The composer states that hearing a performance of Bach's *St Matthew*

Passion at the age of 17 inspired his musical vocation, but he waited until he was 60, with a substantial catalogue of commissions for some of America's leading classical singers and instrumentalists under his belt, before tackling the Crucifixion story. He has succeeded in giving it a completely fresh treatment, drawing on both Hebrew texts from the Jewish scriptures and Gospel texts in English from two translations, the Revised Standard Version and the Complete Jewish Bible. The score is symphonic in its richness and operatic in its drama; scenes are set with extraordinary vividness, and there is some wonderful, lyrical writing for the vocal soloists, particularly an exquisite soprano aria after Judas has hanged

himself. This is a fine recording of a substantial and powerful work; I recommend *C&O* readers to discover it for themselves.

CLARE STEVENS

Johann Theile: *Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi*

Marie Luise Werneburg (s), Johanna Bookmeyer (s), David Erler (c-t), Hans Jörg Mammel (Evangelist, t), Christian Volkmann (t), Dominik Wörner (Christus, b), Joachim Höchbauer (b), Weser-Renaissance Bremen / Manfred Cordes (dir)
CPO 555 285-2 [61:09]

★★★★★



Born in Naumburg in 1646, Johann Thiele was a pupil of Heinrich Schütz and worked as a freelance composer and teacher in Lübeck before taking up Kapellmeister positions first with Duke Christian Albrecht of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorf and then with Duke Anton Ulrich of Wolfenbüttel, a state which according to the notes for this CD deserves to be better known as a cultural hub of northern Germany in the early modern era. Thiele's intimate, economical setting of the *St Matthew Passion*, published in 1673, is performed immaculately here by a very small ensemble; the soloists combine for the choruses and are accompanied by two violins, three viols, an organ and a chitarrone. I loved everything about this recording, from the eloquent, sinuous score to the range of instrumental colour – alternating poignant delicacy with surprising power – and committed performances from singers whose voices satisfyingly combine warmth with purity.

CLARE STEVENS

COLLEGIUM VOCALE GENT – 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Collegium Vocale Gent / Philippe Herreweghe (dir)

Outhere music PHI LPH033 (6CDs)

[56:48; 59:40; 75:22; 68:30; 50:49; 42:33]

★★★★★



CD1 Brahms: Works for choir (*Schicksalslied*; *Alto Rhapsody*; *Warum ist das Licht gegeben*; *Begräbnisgesang*; *Gesang der*

Parzen)

Ann Hallenberg (m-s), Orchestre des Champs-Élysées

CD2 Victoria: Officium Defunctorum; Four Motets

CD3 Beethoven: Missa solennis

Marlis Peterson (s), Gerhild Romberger (m-s), Benjamin Hulett (t), David Wilson-Johnson (bar), Orchestre des Champs-Élysées

CD4 Bach: Cantatas BWV 48, 73, 44, 109;

Johann Schelle: Komm, Jesu, komm

Dorothee Mileds (s), Damien Guillon (c-t), Thomas Hobbs (t), Peter Kooij (b)

CDs 5&6 Dvořák: Requiem

Ilse Eerens (s), Bernarda Fink (a), Maximilian Schmitt (t), Nathan Berg (b), Antwerp Symphony Orchestra

Collegium Vocale Gent celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. In its half-century, CVG has expanded its repertoire: starting out as a specialist early music group, it has evolved and enlarged, embracing Philippe Herreweghe's own period-instrument orchestra (the splendid Orchestre des Champs-Élysées), so that today this flexible ensemble can perform anything from the earliest vocal music to Stravinsky and beyond. Herreweghe has himself chosen some

of CVG's finest recordings from their own label in celebration, brought together in an appropriately gold-tinged 6-CD boxed set.

CD1 is devoted to Brahms's shorter chorus and orchestra works, first released in 2011. It's a corker of a recording, with one of the most exquisite renditions of the *Song of Destiny* on disc. The orchestra's silky strings and transparent choral textures are beautiful throughout and contribute to Herreweghe's detailed probing of this music. Also from 2011, CD2 focuses on the Spanish master Victoria's Requiem for Maria of Austria, the daughter of Spain's Charles V, which was published in Madrid in 1605. CVG's crystal-clear sound and impeccable intonation, together with Herreweghe's attention to detail – he misses nothing in this music – conspire to create an absorbing experience.

CD3 is Herreweghe's 2011 *Missa solennis*. Despite his period-instrument forces, the conductor gives Beethoven's masterpiece due weight and reverence: nothing is forced or rough-edged. While the soloists and CVG are excellent, the real star of this recording is the orchestra, who play with spirit and passion.

The sequence of cantatas from Bach's first year in Leipzig (CD4) finds CVG and Herreweghe very much on home territory. Not as rhythmically driven as some conductors, Herreweghe shows there is a different way with this music, one full of poise and dance. Fine soloists complement the superb choral sound. CD5 and 6 are devoted to Herreweghe's 2014 recording of Dvořák's mighty and still too little-known Requiem. Herreweghe and his forces are consistently responsive to the drama, passion and consolation of this remarkable work, though just occasionally the choral sound feels a little underpowered in the big climaxes.

PHILIP REED

▼ 'Full of poise': Philippe Herreweghe conducts Collegium Vocale Gent and the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées



RUDY CAILIER

EARLY MUSIC



Rebecca Tavener rounds up the latest releases

Latin was a universal language, right? On the page, yes, but what about in the ear? This is where it gets sonically interesting, when performers don't take the easy route by reverting to some generalised pseudo-Italianate pronunciation. For **The Office of St Sigfrid 'Celebremus karissimi'** [Sterling CDA 1840-2] the four singers of Ensemble Gemma attempt 'Latin as it would have been pronounced in the High Middle Ages in Sweden'. I'm not convinced about their consistency, but well done, anyway. The vocalists on this important recording of one of Sweden's oldest repertoires are of individual character, ranging in technical accomplishment, and one assumes that the vibrant voice of many of the incipits belongs to their director, Karin Strinnholm Lagergren. Their selection of unique chant repertoire associated with Växjö Cathedral is not a liturgical reconstruction and does not pretend to authenticity. The *vevlira* (hurdy-gurdy) is the sole instrumental colour, and the five improvised instrumentals are impressive even though the instrument is far too modern in design and scope. I'd love to hear Johannes Geworkian Hellman grapple with the limitations of a more historically informed organistrum/symphonie.

The next CD traverses 200 years from the early 15th century to the 1620s, and **Praga Rosa Bohemiae** [Supraphon SU 4273-2] includes the world premiere recording of Heinrich Isaac's delightful *Missa Presulum ephebeatum*, framing works by Josquin, Tournhout, Obrecht, Hellinck, Regnart and others, including the late-medieval

▼ La Chapelle Rhénane, whose interpretations 'bristle with energy and joy'



© CLÉMENT CINEUX

Petrus Wilhelmi de Grudencz, upon a motet by whom Isaac built this parody Mass for the Feast of St Martin, an occasion for jocularly as the goose appears in German puns worked into the Latin of the original Martinmas carol. Cappella Mariana boasts nine superb singers, including the outstanding soprano Hana Blažíková, heard in various combinations and directed from within by tenor Vojtěch Semerád. The ideal if indulgent acoustics of the refectory of Osek Monastery cast a glowing halo around so much vocal beauty.

Through the Covid-19 emergency I have been thinking of Scrooge saying 'I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year', so no apologies for continuing with recordings for that loveliest of seasons. Beginning in middle Europe, in 1697 an anthology appeared in Strasbourg containing what collector

The indulgent acoustics of the monastery cast a glowing halo

Wilhelm Egon Count von Fürstenberg called 'The Completely New Catholic Song-book of the Strasbourg Diocese'. As you might expect, here are religious ditties designed to be popular, some terpsichorean, some rustic, some very catchy. The members of Spielleyt – Early Music Strasbourg have made a Christmas selection for **Weihnacht der Spielleyt** [Christophorus CHE 0218-2] with a vividly entertaining spectrum of instrumental colour in dances by Susato, Michael Praetorius and Athanasius Kircher (his *Antidotum Tarantulae*) interleaving songs performed by the flexible Regina Kabis. They are intended for consort or congregational singing and well worth choral exploration if you can find the sheet music. Recorded with involving, immediate clarity, this makes delightful Tafelmusik for festive feasting.

Performers from Alsace bring two early baroque masters together for **Rosenmüller: Es waren Hirten auf dem Felde** [Christophorus CHR 77445], which also features Schütz's *Weihnachtshistorie*. The singers and instrumentalists of La Chapelle Rhénane, directed by tenor Benoît Haller (who also takes the role of Evangelist), offer interpretations bristling with energy and joy, characterised by elegant phrasing, gloriously free ornamentation, and an evident relish for this music and the season. Though the recording occasionally favours the band, vocal detail never goes missing, and there's a fetching immediacy, compelling the hearer to attend and marvel. Finally, if you don't already possess the delicately glorious 1994 recording of **Handel's Messiah** from Les Arts Florissants [Harmonia mundi HAF 8901498.99], it has been reissued for the group's 40th anniversary. Using the Dublin 1742 version in the subtle, nimble, weightless manner of luminously lacy chamber music, it is full of light and air while radiating magisterial power as required.

Rebecca Tavener is a singer and director specialising in early and contemporary music. She is founder-director of Canty, Scotland's only professional medieval music group.

◀ Johann Simon Mayr: *Mass in E flat major*

Dorota Szczepańska (s), Johanna Krödel (a), Markus Schäfer (t), Daniel Ochoa (bar), Simon Mayr Chorus, Concerto de Bassus / Franz Hauk (dir)

Naxos 8.574057 [86:46]

★★★★



Most of this exuberant and elaborate *concertata* Mass

setting was written in 1843, two years before Mayr's death. It has been reconstructed and arranged by Franz Hauk and Manfred Hößl for this world premiere recording. Although in some respects the style harks back to Haydn and Mozart, the work is essentially a virtuosic and inventive showcase for both instrumental and vocal soloists: it features one of the least penitential Kyries you will ever hear, a Gloria that is reminiscent of a circus parade, and multiple key changes and repeats as each movement appears to be drawing to a close. Listening to such an effervescent work in Holy Week was a slightly bizarre experience, but it is great fun and the performers clearly relished recording it.

CLARE STEVENS

James Whitbourn: *The Seven Heavens and other choral works*

Cor Cantiamo / Eric A. Johnson (dir)

Divine Art DDA 25192 [65:34]

★★★★



The title work was commissioned to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Belfast Philharmonic Choir, and traces the life and thinking of Belfast-born C.S. Lewis using the imagery of the medieval planets; the original orchestral

scoring has been reduced to chamber ensemble for this recording by Illinois-based professional chamber choir Cor Cantiamo. *The Seven Heavens* is a well-crafted and accessible work with an interesting backstory, and this engaging performance proves that it travels well. The shorter works on the disc include an attractive grace written for college feasts at St Stephen's House, Oxford; a reworking using an English text from the Requiem Mass of an elegiac orchestral piece written for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother; and a set of Evening Canticles that includes characteristically Jewish musical elements in tribute to the shared heritage of Mary and Simeon.

CLARE STEVENS

Leonard Bernstein: *Mass*

Vojtěch Dyk (celebrant/bar), Gustav Harms, Emil Lang, Nicolas Rudner (boy soloists), Wiener Singakademie (Heinz Ferlesch, chorusmaster), Opera School of Vienna State Opera (Johannes Mertl, director), Company of Music (Johannes Hiemetsberger, chorusmaster), ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra / Dennis Russell Davies (dir)

Capriccio C5370 (2CDs) [2:10:47]

★★★★



Some works fail to be bigger than their backstory or the personality of

their creator. Bernstein's *Mass*, commissioned by Jacqueline Onassis, was influenced by Bernstein's conducting at JFK's funeral in 1968 and by the Beethoven centenary two years later; also by his collaborations with rock singers and film directors. The first theatre performances were not a success, but the piece has

continued to enjoy a life as a recorded work, conducted by Bernstein himself, Kent Nagano, Marin Alsop and Kristjan Järvi. If it seemed that yet another version was *de trop*, Dennis Russell Davies trumps them all with a performance that can only be described as Bernsteinian, but in trumps. It's huge, over-the-top, but its modish appropriations seem more routine and less jarring than they did in 1971 and Vojtěch Dyk is a charismatic celebrant, pitched just right between holiness and theatricality.

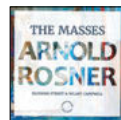
BRIAN MORTON

Arnold Rosner: *The Masses*

Blossom Street / Hilary Campbell (dir)

Convivium CR053 [72:00]

★★★★



Arnold Rosner once said that his music inhabited a 'netherworld between really modern and conservatively predictable'. That has made him difficult to understand. His preference for early baroque polyphony wedded to modern triadic techniques often seems incongruous, but allows him extraordinary freedom of expression. Fortunately, Hilary Campbell isn't put off and delivers these two highly personal Masses – written by a Jewish composer deeply influenced by Catholicism – with brisk confidence. The *Missa L'homme armé* was written amid the bloody dregs of the Vietnam war, and Rosner's anger and pacifism are precariously balanced in it; Blossom Street carry off that potential contradiction beautifully. The *In nomine* Mass

is more accommodating, but still bravely bridges renaissance and 20th century, entirely without irony. Again, there's nothing arch about Campbell's estimable reading.

BRIAN MORTON

Luciano Berio: *Coro*; Cries Of London*

Norwegian Soloists' Choir,

*Norwegian Radio Orchestra /

Grete Pedersen (dir)

BIS SACD 2391 [73:26]

★★★★



Coro is one of the great works of the 20th century, and while it seems to

stake its claim by sheer force of numbers – 40 singers and an even larger phalanx of players – they're very subtly deployed and it takes a conductor of some skill, and a recording engineer (Andreas Ruge) of near-genius to get the spatial arrangements of single singers and partnered instruments to work almost as if one were in the concert hall with them. It's a mighty *tour de force*, particularly with Surround sound, but it doesn't bluster. *Cries Of London* is far from lightweight, but it comes as a gentle anticlimax to the main piece and many listeners might prefer to take them separately. Berio has been somewhat in eclipse of late. This triumphantly reasserts his importance.

BRIAN MORTON

Eriks Ešēvalds: *Translations*

Portland State Chamber Choir, Charles Noble (va), Marilyn de Oliveira (vc), David Walters (singing handbells), Joel Bluestone (vib, glock, chimes), Florian Conzetti (vib, cymbal, bass drum) / Ethan Sperry (dir)

Naxos 8.574124 [59:20]

★★★★



Ešenvalds is a little notorious for using lush modern neo-tonality alongside – often literally alongside – a more pungent 20th-century manner, but he makes it work and his ability to make complex texts sing is second to none. The settings here are of Thomas Aquinas, Silouan the Athonite (whom Thomas Merton believed to be the most spiritual monk of the modern age), the poets Wilhelm Müller and Paulann Petersen, and the Catholic liturgy. *O salutaris hostia* is a simple prayer woven together out of continuously overlaid phrases that put considerable demand on the singers. *The Heavens' Flock* begins wordlessly and weaves a folk legend from the Pacific Northwest into as glorious an evocation of the life beyond as *In paradisum* at the end of the set. But it's the shimmering handbells on *Translation* that really captures Ešenvalds's ability to blend instrumental sound and voices to the extent that one hardly knows which is which. Superb work from the Portland choir and players.

BRIAN MORTON

The Road Home: Choral Music From America

Georgie Gulliver (s), Brianna Louwen (s), Rosie Parker (a), Hugh Beckwith (t), Oliver Hooper (t), Timothy Butt (b), Willow Consort / Danny Purtell (dir)

Convivium CR048 [61:00]

★★★★



It is almost impossible to make such an eclectic collection of pieces cohere, but Danny Purtell and Willow Consort just

about manage it. The music ranges from 'Deep River' and the Sacred Harp-influenced *Soar Away* by Carter Sligh to the climax of Bern Herbolzheimer's extraordinary setting of the *Seven Last Words*, which almost deserves a disc of its own – all the more so, given the composer's early death in 2016. The choir tackles everything with relaxed authority and no strain, but the nature of the record makes it hard to absorb as a whole. Frank Ticheli's threnody for a child, *There Will Be Rest*, sits oddly between Norman Luboff's arrangement of 'Were You There' and the Herbolzheimer piece. For once, Stephen Paulus is eclipsed, even though he claims the title piece.

BRIAN MORTON

Couperin: Leçons de ténèbres; Gesualdo: Tenebrae Responses for Maundy Thursday

Grace Davidson (s), Julia Boyle (s), Jonathan Ross (vdg), Steven Divine (org), Tenebrae / Nigel Short (dir)

Signum Classics SIGCD622 [77:09]

★★★★



This CD presents an interesting juxtaposition of French and Italian styles, separated chronologically by at least a century, but united by their liturgical context of Holy Week. In the Couperin *Leçons* (1713-17), Grace Davidson and Julia Boyle are magnificent in their well-matched voices, control, diction and intonation, although there was scope for more stylised pronunciation to adjust the musical rhythms, recommended by treatises on singing and declamation. The gamba and organ sound slightly further back in the balance. The

Gesualdo (early 17th-century) is sung by six solo voices, wonderfully balanced and tuned to perfection, bringing out the rich idiosyncratic harmonies characteristic of the composer.

DAVID PONSFORD

Parry: Songs of Farewell, and works by Stanford, Gray and Wood

Choir of Westminster Abbey / James O'Donnell (dir)

Hyperion CDA 68301 [64:45]

★★★★



In this satisfying programme from James O'Donnell and the Choir of Westminster Abbey, the main feature of Parry's masterly *Songs of Farewell* are joined by shorter pieces by his contemporaries Stanford (*Three Latin Motets*; 8-part Magnificat in B flat), Alan Gray (Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in F minor) and Wood (Nunc dimittis in B flat). All these pieces show off the best of the Abbey Choir, who sound totally inside this music and sing with confidence and not a little panache. They present a well-balanced choral sound throughout, though it does on occasion favour the fearless trebles, who as a consequence can sound a little forced and unvaried in tone.

PHILIP REED

Michael Gordon: Anonymous Man

The Crossing / Donald Nally (dir)

Cantaloupe Music CA21154

[58:00]

★★★★



Scored for 24 a cappella voices, *Anonymous Man* enlarges Gordon's approach to composition, layering minimalistic bites of vocal material over each other to

create music that occupies a hypnotic, incantatory soundworld. It was commissioned and premiered in 2017 by The Crossing. As Gordon explains in a brief liner note, *Anonymous Man* is autobiographical: it concerns his moving into a loft apartment in the DeBrosses neighbourhood of New York City, meeting his future wife and conversations he had there with two homeless men. Donald Nally and The Crossing give a superbly accomplished account of this work, rhythmically precise and with impeccable intonation.

PHILIP REED

Lights, Stories, Noise, Dreams, Love and Noodles: Music by Will Todd

Bach Choir, Finchley Children's Music Group, Will Todd Ensemble / David Hill (dir)

Signum Records SIGCD 591

[56:27]

★★★★



This CD will win many friends for Will Todd and his exuberant music. From the *Songs of Magical Creatures* – four Shakespeare settings – to *Kites*, *Cards and Constellations* to settings of Todd's own words, the Bach Choir under their musical director David Hill respond to Todd's soundworld with sensitivity and commitment. In the album's title work, in which Todd collaborated with Michael Rosen ('a joyous and inspirational experience', as the composer observes), the Bach Choir are joined by the quite brilliant Finchley Children's Music Group and the jazz musicians of the Will Todd Ensemble. The result is infectious music-making of the

highest order. In short, this CD is a lot of fun.

PHILIP REED

Beethoven: Missa solemnis

Alison Hargan (s), Marjana Lipovšek (m-s), Thomas Moser (t), Matthias Hölle (bar), Wiener Singverein, ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, Rudolf Scholz (org) / Michael Gielen (dir)

Orfeo C999201 [74:26]

★★★★★



Despite – or perhaps because of – his reputation with contemporary music, the conductor Michael Gielen, who died in 1919, was always a fine interpreter of Beethoven. He recorded a well-received cycle of the composer's symphonies as well as conducting a much-acclaimed production of *Fidelio* at the Salzburg Festival. This recording of Beethoven's late-period masterpiece, the *Missa solemnis*, dates from the mid-1980s when Gielen was at the height of his powers. Recorded in Vienna's Musikverein, one suspects it is taken from a couple of radio broadcasts – the liner notes do not say so, but given the presence of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, the quality of the recorded sound (which is not poor, it should be said, but is hardly demonstration standard) and the very occasional lapses of ensemble, it seems likely. What impresses most about this recording is Gielen's grasp of the work's overall architecture, yet which still allows room for lots of local detail. The soloists are well matched and the Wiener Singverein are clearly well-disciplined and up to the task in hand.

PHILIP REED



▲ 'Assurance, beauty of tone, and conviction': the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge

Stabat

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, The Dmitri Ensemble / Graham Ross (dir)

Harmonia mundi HMM 905323 [79:44]

★★★★★



This exceptional recording from Graham Ross and his Clare College

Choir joins their thematic discography exploring seasons of the church year. *Stabat* is largely concerned with Passiontide, though not exclusively. What does unite it unequivocally is its exploration of north European choral music and the new musical vocabulary that emerged from the beginning of the 1980s. The Estonian Arvo Pärt is the leading figure and his music – the *Stabat Mater*, *Da pacem*, *Domine*, *The Woman in the Alabaster Box*, and his *Magnificat & Nunc dimittis* – takes the lion's share, to which is added James MacMillan's *Miserere* and the Latvian Peteris Vasks's beautiful *Plainscapes*. Ross has curated a programme that engages the listener on every level – one which, on the evidence of this disc, inspired his youthful singers to give of their very best. They sing with great assurance, beauty of tone and great conviction, ably

supported by the Dmitri Ensemble. A fine achievement.

PHILIP REED

ORGAN MUSIC

Jürg Baur: Archaische Variationen

Edition Dohr 98527, £13.50

Charles Callahan: Voluntaries for manuals – 14 hymn-based preludes and postludes

Morning Star, US\$19.00

Johann Christian Heinrich Rinck: Die drei ersten Monate auf der Orgel

Reinhard Kluth (ed.)
Edition Dohr 27470, £21.95

Brussels, Royal Library, MSII 3326 mus. vol.1

Jean Ferrand (ed.)
UTOrpheus, £163.95

Jürg Baur's *Archaische Variationen* live up to their title, their strict contrapuntal devices driven by rigorous motivic manipulation in a manner not unlike Radulescu or Heiller. Five 'inventions', in which canonic treatment is to the fore, are separated by more rhapsodic passages (rhapsodic

in relative terms, at least). The fifth and climactic invention sees the textures expand to include double pedal, *fortissimo*, before the work dies away quietly with an allusion to the opening bars. Two versions of the work are included in the copy – longer and shorter – although the two versions are in many ways closely similar. It's all unimpeachably engineered, but it may be music it's easier to admire than love. A clean neoclassical palette is pretty much de rigueur and an ability to read four staves simultaneously is likewise essential.

Charles Callahan's

Voluntaries for manuals could hardly be more different. Everything is comfortably laid out and easeful melodic gestures are to the forefront. Most of the tunes will be well-known to UK congregations – 'Dix', 'Hanover', 'Repton' and the like – although some melodies and tune/text pairings will be less familiar. The tune is heard complete in most preludes, although some (e.g. 'Hanover') treat the melody in a more generally motivic sense. Even here, though, the most tin-eared congregant could hardly fail to spot what's going on. A useful collection for liturgical organists of modest technical ability.

Despite the editor's encouraging words, Rinck's tutor – **Die drei ersten Monate auf der Orgel** – is probably of more significance as a record of 19th-century approaches to pedagogy than it is as a functioning tutor for the aspiring young organist of 2020. The volume progresses from manual exercises in semibreves – clearly assuming minimal keyboard fluency – through more complex rhythms and phrasings until the pedals are introduced with a regimen of scale and arpeggio patterns (all fully pedalled, offering insights

YOUNG VOICES



Arrangements from films and musicals, alongside new pieces by Will Todd and Jim Papoulis

If you are curious to explore with your young choir new arrangements of contemporary popular songs, maybe from films or shows,

the Hal Leonard Europe Popular Song Series (available for both SATB, SAB and 2-part) offers a wealth of titles. All the pieces are arranged by widely experienced and expert arrangers, such as Ed Lojeski in Elton John's great **I'm Gonna Love Me Again** (SATB & pno, + instrs. (opt.); Hal Leonard 00304813, £1.99), and Philip Lawson, with his particularly fine arrangement of David Bowie's **Life On Mars** (SATBB unacc.; Hal Leonard HX.454754, £3.50). From so many very good pieces to choose from, I would particularly recommend looking at **Dear Evan Hansen (Choral Highlights)**, arranged by Mark Brymer (2-part choir & pno, + instrs. (opt.); Hal Leonard HL00250214, £3.25). This original Broadway show, with its reference to the extreme mental health needs of so many young people today, will resonate with a young choir. It will not be necessary for students to have seen the show in order to be moved by the music, and the text of the song 'You will be found' is particularly beautifully set for the young soprano and alto voices, with opportunities at times for a small vocal group within the texture of the writing.

If a concert requires a poignant piece calling for calm and reflection, I would highly recommend Will Todd's **Precious Moment** from *Songs of Peace* (SA & pno/org; Boosey & Hawkes BH12947, £2.50). The text is intentionally ambiguous, suggesting both the gift of the Christ Child and also the gift of life, using words such as 'Precious gift of forgiveness' and 'Life so precious, gifted

▼ Calling for calm and reflection: Will Todd



ROB BLACKHAM

to me'. This piece can therefore be used as a Christmas carol as well as more generally. If you work with an experienced SATB youth choir, I would strongly recommend exploring all six movements of *Songs of Peace*, which is a beautiful work.

If you want to include something very new, one of the most recently published works for youth choir is the infectiously rhythmic piece by Jim Papoulis, **Lift up your Voice and Sing** (SATB & pno + perc.: Boosey & Hawkes BHI 48545,

£2.25). Papoulis is known for his distinctive style, which combines musical traditions from around the world. This composition was created in a song-writing workshop in New Jersey with a high



'Jim Papoulis's piece is perfectly written for young voices'

school choir, in which he found that the students often 'felt stifled by the pressures and expectations of others'. This piece embraces a powerful message within the words 'Let your song be heard' and concludes with 'Now I can breathe'. It is perfectly written for young voices, with the basses never having to sing below B flat, and the occasional divisi in the alto line creates a contemporary edge, with occasional dissonant clusters sounding in five vocal parts. This highly accessible, life-affirming piece would be a welcome addition to any school concert.

Also newly released, from Carus-Verlag, are **James Bond – Three Arrangements for Choir** (Christoph J.K. Müller, arr.; SATB & pno or str. orch. – parts available to download; Carus Verlag 978-3-89948-405-2, choral score per 20 copies EUR 6.80). The three themes are *Die Another Day*, *Live and Let Die* and the James Bond theme. Choirs don't usually have a chance to sing these blockbuster pieces, but these highly effective vocal arrangements offer young students an insight into the creation of these iconic works as well as a taste of performing some widely contrasting vocal writing. Written in four parts but with some divisi, particularly in the James Bond theme with its recurring 'de de ge de_ de de de' and 'dja dap, ba ja, ba da wa_', the arrangements present a refreshing opportunity to make vocal sounds away from text and meaning.

Joy Hill directs the Royal College of Music Junior Department Chamber Choir, RCMJD Parry Voices and Vigala Singers. She has worked extensively with young voices and is known for her commitment to new choral music.

◀ into the use of the toe and heel).

A double pedal exercise sees the combination of hands and feet together in a number of short free-composed exercises. There's some useful material in here, but it can in no way be regarded as exhaustive or comprehensive in the manner of modern tutors.

The fairly eye-watering price tag for the last item reviewed here – **Brussels, Royal Library, MSII 3326 mus. vol.1**, the first of two volumes – suggests it is squarely directed at institutional libraries. The manuscript in question is the only extant source of the works of Van der Kerckhoven (c.1618-c.1701), so it's of major importance to scholars of the period. There's fascinating discussion of the physical characteristics of the MS, of pagination, graphical issues, scribal habits and the like, and a comprehensive editorial apparatus. The music itself consists of four sets of short alternatim versets of various liturgical function which are ascribed with certainty to Van der Kerckhoven himself (among them a *Salve Regina* and *Missa Duplex*), as well as a number of similar works whose attributions are divided between 15 other composers. The text is beautifully clear, the editorial standards impeccable: but given the limited practical application of the works it contains, this is probably one for the specialist.

STEPHEN FARR



CHORAL MUSIC

Johann Rosenmüller: **O Nomen Jesu, Nomen Dulce**

SATB & cont.

Edition Dohr 17799, £8.95

David L. Brunner: **The Apple Tree**

SATB & pno

Boosey & Hawkes 48023940,
US\$2.10

Mårten Jansson: *Stillae* (Drops)

SSATB unacc.

Bärenreiter BA 8528, £4.50

Toby Young: **If You Love Me**

SATB unacc.

Oxford University Press 978-0-19-353180-2 £2.20

'But the church is an awkward space for concerts,' said this choir director to me. 'The organ is at the other end from the choir. What I'm looking for is an interesting baroque piece with a continuo part so uncomplicated that it should be easy to keep everything together.' Well, choir director, we all know the problem! It so happens that what you are looking for crossed my desk just a few days ago. The works of Johann Rosenmüller are gradually being unveiled by Edition Dohr, based in Cologne. **O Nomen Jesu, Nomen Dulce** fits the above requirements perfectly. The imitative melodies are strongly directional, and the juxtaposition of duple and triple time occurs delightfully throughout the piece. The most florid phrases are at the beginning, and might to advantage be given to fewer singers or soloists. The only downside is the price per copy, but maybe a better deal for

multiple copies can be struck.

In **The Apple Tree**, David L. Brunner has given us a new setting of the text so familiar to us from the version by Elizabeth Poston. The piano accompaniment in the copy could easily be converted into an organ part by experienced players if necessary, and the composer has given the text an 'easy-feel', lilting melody in 3/4 time. Mr Brunner has not relied on mere repetition for each of the verses, and the variations he introduces, particularly in the rhythms leading up to the final cadence, mark this piece out as superior to many in the genre. There is however one small problem: the prevailing rhythmic pattern of the melody is a longer note at the beginning of each measure followed by three quavers (eighth-notes) at the end, with a separate syllable for each. English is a funny old language – sometimes three syllables take no time at all to pronounce, sometimes they take half a day. Where the latter is the case, the composer's metronome mark at c.88 is too fast. The piece works quite happily (and sits more calmly in the mouth) at 76.

Stillae by Mårten Jansson sets four verses of somewhat idiosyncratic Latin by the American poet Charles Anthony Silvestri. 'Stillae' are the drops – whether of water, tears or blood – that reflect in four verses on the life of Christ, and form a modern Marian antiphon. There is a nice variety of texture about the music – we start with the four lowest voices, verse 1 is allocated to the three upper voices, and the last verse alternates between SSA and TBB – and in these passages the harmonic language has a cool, lucid simplicity. The



central section of the work is more impassioned, with Regeresque modulations colouring an ardent invocation of the Blessed Virgin. *Stillae* would suit choirs of any size for whom accurate tuning is not a problem.

Toby Young's **If You Love Me** was written for the choir of Keble College, Oxford. It works perfectly as a short anthem or introit, and Young's word-setting is exemplary. A small quibble: as we climb out of the one true climax into the coda, the sopranos suddenly and arbitrarily sing the word 'and', which leaves the rest of the text in limbo. 'O' would be better. Otherwise the whole piece is a model of the maxim 'less is more'.

JEREMY JACKMAN

Anton Bruckner: **Mass in E minor, WAB 27 (second version, 1882)**

Dagmar Glüxam (ed.)

SSAATTBB chorus, 15 wind and brass instrs.

Carus 27.093, full score €33.00



Bruckner's Mass in E minor (no.2 of three Mass settings written in Linz) is unique. Partly because of its instrumentation (nine brass and double woodwind without flutes) and partly because of its extensive a cappella sections, ▶

PIERRE BONNIA



▲ The new Linz Cathedral, for which Bruckner wrote his E minor Mass

◀ the Mass in E minor occupies a special place in Bruckner's output. Although it looks to be prime chamber choir material, it was actually designed to be heard outdoors, and the choir numbered 160-odd at the premiere – the votive chapel of Linz's new cathedral hadn't yet been built in the cathedral square, which is why the inauguration was an outdoor event. The 15 wind instruments deputise for the organ, although Bruckner uses them properly as orchestral instruments and the approach of the Mass is fundamentally polyphonic. Bruckner was a contrapuntalist through and through: when he was in his early 30s, he studied counterpoint with the legendary Simon Sechter for five years, and that set him up for his compositional life.

Bruckner wrote the Mass in E minor in the autumn of 1866. The first performance had to wait for three years (until the inauguration service for which the piece was written actually happened). But some things are worth waiting for, and even 15 years after the event Bruckner described the day of its first performance as 'the most wonderful day of my life'. During Bruckner's 28

rehearsals for the piece – and there had been a significant number of rehearsals even before Bruckner got his hands on the performers – the Mass was described by the organist Josef Seiberl as 'a contrapuntal masterpiece in every respect, a thoroughly original composition'. Seven years after the premiere Bruckner made alterations to the structure, by revising phrase lengths, for instance; these revisions were by no means trivial. After those 1876 revisions, Bruckner made further changes in 1882. It is the 1883 manuscript copy by Johann Noll (made at Bruckner's request) that Dagmar Glüxam has used as the primary source for this new Carus edition. As ever with Carus, the scholarship underlying the edition is impeccable. The Foreword appears in German and is translated into English, whereas the Critical Commentary appears only in German. I should stop complaining about this aspect of Carus editions; after all, much of the Commentary is in the nature of a list rather than a prose exposition, so it is pretty straightforward to follow, even for a non-German speaker.

Dr Glüxam's edition is beautifully laid out, and includes blank staves when the instruments are resting (in the edition that I have used previously, the instruments vanish from the score when they're not playing). I prefer the Carus solution. A small gripe is the lack of plainchant incipits at the beginning of the Gloria and Credo. None of the 19th-century sources has them, so presumably the selection was obvious at the time. That said, it would have been helpful for Carus to have included them, perhaps even in the Commentary if not in the main body of the score. For what it's worth, I use Mass VIII (*de angelis*) for the Gloria and Mass I (which is also II and IV as well as the alternatives to V and VI) for the Credo. And, tiny criticisms aside, I'll be using this Carus edition from now on. If you need convincing of the musical worth of this Mass, then cut straight to the 'Et incarnatus est' section within the Credo and you will hear something that rivals the Lux aeterna section in Fauré's Requiem for sheer sacred beauty.

JEREMY SUMMERLY

the work of the South Island Organ Company Ltd over a period of half a century. The firm was established by two emigrant English organ builders in 1968 and has since become the largest firm of its type in Australasia, with contracts extending as far as Perth, on the Australian western coast. It has established an exemplary record in organ conservation, with many notable successes including two town hall organs in New Zealand and a number of cathedral instruments, and pioneered the successful restoration of pneumatic actions.

The author traces its history through the examination of milestones in the firm's history, looking at key achievements and the personnel who have worked with the firm. Jill Worrall has interviewed not only people working there, but also organists and conservation experts.

In the middle of building many fine examples of the firm's work came the tragic earthquakes in Christchurch, which saw the loss of three valued staff members and the destruction of numerous significant instruments.

The book avoids technical detail and is rather a descriptive outline of the firm's work. It might have been helpful to have included an overall listing of the firm's contracts.

Having worked in an advisory role with South Island on several restoration projects in Australia, I can testify to the firm's remarkable attention to detail and its extraordinary problem-solving skills. Jill Worrall's book is a worthy testament to its remarkable contribution to organ building in the region.

JOHN MAIDMENT

BOOKS

More than a Pipe Dream: Pipe Organ Building in New Zealand – 50 years of the South Island Organ Company

Jill Worrall

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ENCOUNTERS

BEN ENGLAND, VIRTUAL CHOIR CONDUCTOR



COURTESY BEN ENGLAND

I'm a full-time conductor, leading choirs, orchestras and operas in the West Country and south Wales. Last Christmas, I had the idea of running online rehearsals for people who couldn't get to choirs, and set up a simple website, homechoir.uk. It is free to access, and is a one-way model: I make videos and people sing along, but I can't see or hear them. This reduces the tech issues for choristers and makes it safe for everyone.

When lockdown began in March, I became concerned about some of my older choristers who had been recently bereaved and were alone. I recorded a short singing session on my phone, and put it on YouTube for them – and the Quarantine Choir was born. Every weekday at 2pm I broadcast a live, free, one-hour session for anyone to join. It has become a supportive community where people united by loneliness sing with me, but also chat, share pictures of their families, etc.

I've also started up the Quarantine Chorus, a pre-recorded programme teaching choral classics such as Mozart's *Ave verum* and Handel's *Zadok*; a Sunday morning live

broadcast, *Sacred Sing*; and a children's show, *QC kids*, with dozens of videos, which my daughter Katie (11) has now taken over, putting out regular teaching videos.

Initially, to build support, I asked all my choristers and musical friends to share the videos with anyone who was missing their choirs. It took off rapidly. Homechoir has over 2,100 subscribed members so far, and thousands more watch the videos every day. I receive dozens of emails daily from people who are alone and isolated, who are moved by the music and the friendship. To join the Quarantine Choir, visit YouTube and search for Homechoir. There you'll find more than 100 broadcasts and videos covering a huge range of styles and genres – and it's all free.

I was contacted by Mark Strachan, who was looking for a tech-savvy conductor to lead his new project, The Self-Isolation Choir, singing Handel's *Messiah* in isolation and performing it virtually at the end of May. It involved live streaming rehearsals every weekday evening, and a potential choir of hundreds. Around 3,500 singers worldwide signed up, many

joining me live for the evening rehearsal. We've continued this online model with three summer projects: a week of John Rutter's pieces, with John's participation; Vivaldi's *Gloria*; and a week of English church music including *Zadok* and Parry's *I Was Glad*. In the autumn we'll be learning Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and of course Christmas will be special. You can join up at theselfisolationchoir.com.

There have been challenges along the way. Foremost was getting my head around the technology. I have some tech skills and am familiar with music tech equipment, but this was a whole new ball game! I watched countless YouTube tutorials and tinkered constantly with the set up. For repertoire, to avoid infringing copyright, I try to source public domain scores while providing a broad range of pieces that appeal to a wide audience. The volume of work is huge: I am not only the conductor but also the arranger, pianist, technician, publicity rep, and my own agent.

Perhaps the hardest thing is finding the courage to just put the music out there every day. I treat everything as if it's a live broadcast, and mistakes be damned – if I stopped and edited everything that went wrong, I'd never get anything published. It's also very hard giving an enthusiastic and kind performance when there's no physical feedback from anybody at the other end. I've had to get very good at visualising groups of people in front of me, and speaking to the empty space with a total trust that everybody at the other end of the camera is doing what I'm asking. To succeed as an online musician, you have to believe not only in yourself but also in the capacity for everybody watching to accomplish what you're dreaming.

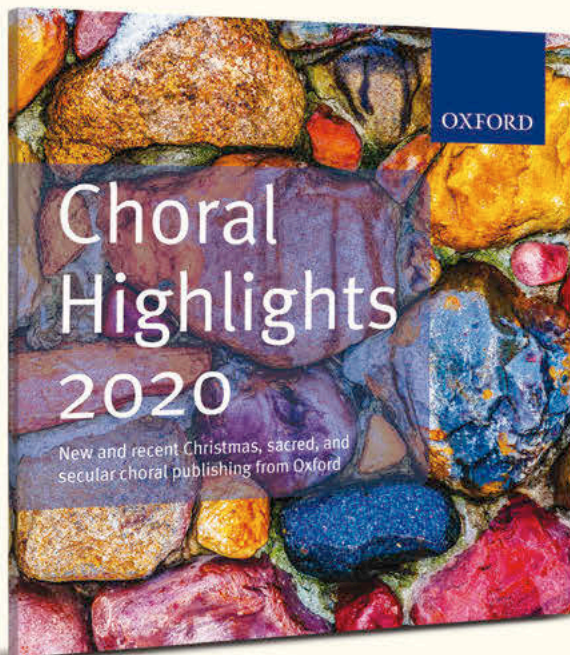
I think the future of choral singing is a blend of what was and what is now. The traditional model of coming together with paper scores will probably continue. The online model provides a much-needed connection to music and community, but without the anxiety about catching a lethal virus. I can also reach a far wider audience than I am used to. Where else can I lift my hands and lead music across several continents at once? ■

Ben England was talking to the Editor.

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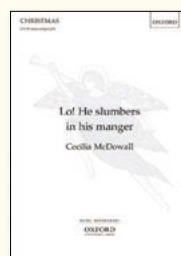
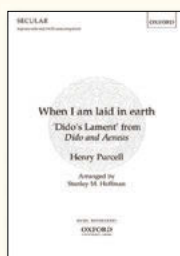
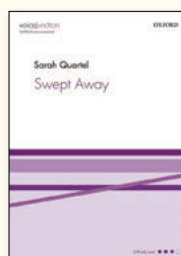
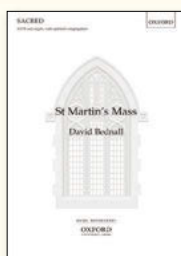
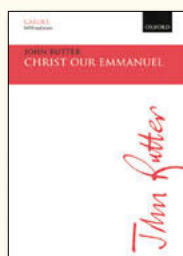
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